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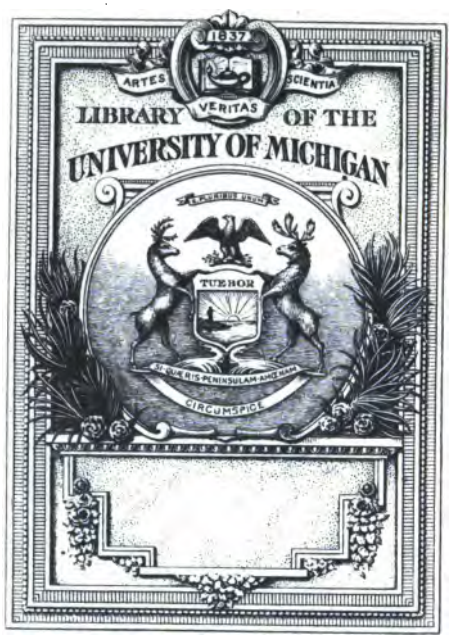
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Sir John Hope
Pinkie House

THE

KUZZILBASH.

A TALE OF KHORASAN.

Fraser, James Baillie

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
HENRY COLBURN, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.
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INTRODUCTION.

DURING a residence of many years in the upper Provinces of India, I had devoted much of my leisure to certain investigations of an Historical nature, connected with the period when the celebrated Nader Shah, Monarch of Persia, succeeded in the most gigantic of his undertakings, and acquired, for a time, military possession of the noble and venerable Capital of the Moghul Empire. In pursuit of this object, I had sedulously collected all the MSS. and other papers within my reach, that promised to bear upon the subject; and applied much time and labour, often indeed to very little purpose, in ascertaining their contents.

One morning, in the burning month of April, after a night rendered sleepless by heat, and by speculations on my favourite subject, I resolved to devote the following day to the examination of a large chest of old papers, which had lately come

into my possession by the kindness of a native friend, and among which I had reason to expect some valuable tracts for my purpose.

An early breakfast was over; the well-watered tatties* were applied to the windows, and diffused through the apartment a cool and fragrant atmosphere, which, as well as the grateful twilight they occasioned, was most comfortably contrasted with the white heat and roar of the fierce hot wind without. Every sound was hushed, but the noise of that wind, and the wild, sweet, melancholy chant of the water-drawer, cheering his bullocks, as they raised the loaded water-skin from the deep well close by, and the occasional bubbling of my own hookah, which had just been furnished with another chillum.† Every thing about me was arranged after the most approved style of Indian comfort, or luxury, if you will; the great chest of papers was placed beside me, and by it, upon a low stool, sat my worthy—old Moonshee, with his long white beard, his huge green turban, and

* Most readers, perhaps, already know, that tatties are frames of bamboo covered with the roots of a sweet-smelling grass, which being applied to the windows, and kept constantly wet, preserve, by the evaporation caused by the hot wind, a grateful coolness. They are used over most of India.

† The piece of earthenware on which the tobacco is placed in the hookah, is called the chillum—"a fresh chillum," therefore, is equivalent to "a fresh pipe."

his old-fashioned, black-rimmed spectacles, just perched on the tip of his nose—peering, slowly, carefully, as if he was handling cobwebs, into the ample but confused contents of the ancient repository.

I soon got hold of a promising volume, written in a fine bold Niskhee hand, while the Moonshee continued dipping into each separate MS. as it came to hand, and now and then recommending one to my attention by an emphatic nod. He stumbled, at length, upon a small thick volume, written in a neat close hand, which seemed particularly to arrest his attention. He turned more towards the light, carefully examined the title and annunciation of the MS.—read a few sentences—took off his glasses deliberately, wiped and replaced them; and then settling himself more firmly on his seat, recommenced his examination. Presently a smile stole over his old withered face; he nodded his head several times, and then looked sideways at me, as if uncertain whether he should interrupt me or not. "What have you got there, Meer Allum-jee?" said I, at last attracted by his manner—"is there any thing in that volume likely to be of use?" "I cannot tell that, Sir," replied he;—"probably not;—but it seems to be a curious work, and one which, in my humble be-

lief, would amuse many of the *Sahib Log*,* (European gentlemen.) It appears to be the history, or memoirs, of a person who lived about the period in which you are interested; but I cannot yet say whether it is likely to answer any purpose to you. I will inquire farther, and report to master."

The continued examination of the volume appeared to increase the old Moonshee's delight; his countenance became more animated as he proceeded, and several half-suppressed exclamations escaped him. At last, turning to me, he said, "I believe this book will not be disagreeable to master: and if he permits it, his servant will read him a few pages."—"By all means, Meer Allum," replied I; for I had by that time discovered that the volume which had occupied me was of little value. "Let us have a fresh chillum, and I shall be happy to learn what it is that has so strongly attracted your gravity."

Meer Allum had not proceeded through many pages, before my curiosity was as fully awakened as he could have desired; I took the book from him, that I might examine it with attention, and, as he had predicted, was soon deeply interested in its contents. I found that it contained the memoirs of a man who had been contemporary with

* The common appellation given to English gentlemen in India—literally, "*the Gentlefolk.*"

and in the service of Nader Shah; and, although it did not appear greatly calculated to promote the object of my inquiries, as I read I became impressed with the belief that, if it could be translated and put into a fitting dress, it might serve, in no unpleasing way, to convey a description of the manners of the age and country in which the writer had spent his life.

Full of this idea, I resolved to attempt a translation of the MS.; but, upon trial, I found it a much more difficult task than I had anticipated. Every language has its peculiar idiom, which seldom can be happily rendered into another tongue; and this is peculiarly the case with Persian; the spirit of which, figurative and periphrastic in a high degree, hardly admits of being transfused into English.

I found also, that the author was apt to dwell too much upon subjects which, however interesting to himself, were not likely to prove so to others, yet which were so intimately connected with some of the leading events which it narrated, that it was very difficult to reject or abridge them. There was much of repetition and sameness of narration, and frequently a coarseness of expression—a fault too common with the author's countrymen—all of which it was absolutely necessary to get rid of, if possible, without destroying the thread or spirit of the story.

It cost me great labour to translate, and cut out as it were from the block, the portion now submitted to public judgment:—but after all my pains, I found that much remained to be done, in order to render the work in any degree tolerable to European readers. The figurative, and often obscure oriental style, would still hang around the translation, embarrassing it with a number of phrases and terms which seemed important to the truth and spirit of the narrative, yet which would be unintelligible to the majority of English readers without numberless notes. These it was necessary to reduce as much as possible; and, after no small consideration, I resolved on sacrificing a part of the object I had in retaining them, to the more important one of rendering the style easy and intelligible. A slight degree of oriental tone has still been preserved, as being essential to the true colouring of eastern scenery; but pains have been taken, both in description and in dialogue, to adopt a language that may sound as little strange or uncouth as possible to European ears.

In justice to the author, however, it is right to mention, that his early education among the rude tribes of the Desert, and the use he continued to make of the Toorkee tongue, which is by far more simple in its phraseology than the Persian, have

given even to his Persian composition a degree of simplicity and freedom, uncommon among writers of that country, and which has, in no small degree, lightened the task of translation.

After all, I found that it was impossible to make the work generally intelligible without some notes. Even after the strictest purgation, there were many phrases and expressions necessarily retained, and some customs alluded to, which required such explanatory notices; but pains have been taken to limit their number and extent, so that I hope they may not be found altogether obnoxious.

It may, very possibly, be thought by many that the system of curtailment has by no means been carried far enough, and objections may be taken, by those who read for mere amusement, to the extent of historical matter which has been admitted, and the frequent occurrence of martial and sanguinary narrations. To this I can only reply, that the intimate connexion which subsisted between my hero and the chief whose fortunes he followed, involved of necessity a considerable share of the first, which moreover promised not to be uninteresting, as it afforded the means of displaying somewhat of the character and disposition of that celebrated conqueror, developed to the eye of an associate high in his favour. With regard to the last it may be remarked, that war and

bloodshed must naturally form prominent features in the history of an adventurer who was born and lived among a rude and turbulent people, divided into a multitude of tribes and districts, at continual variance with each other, and often under a very unsettled government.

Nevertheless, attention has not been spared to vary these passages, and to relieve them by the introduction of matter more suited to the taste of general readers. To effect this, liberties in construction and arrangement, though not in matter-of-fact, have sometimes been taken with the original, and the translator has occasionally been forced to use his own form of narrative instead of that of the author. Much labour has thus been bestowed,—which may be compared with the subterraneous works in a great city, conducing to the general comfort, but not meeting the eye. How far such labour may have been successful, or even well bestowed, the public alone can determine. It may be the opinion of some, that the work might fully as well have been permitted to rest undisturbed in the dust and cobwebs of my friend the Meerza's chest; but if, on the contrary, it should have the good fortune to beguile others of its readers of a few tedious hours, or inspire in any of them a desire to become better acquainted with a portion of the world which for many years

past has occupied too little the attention of the British public, the labour of its translator will have been repaid, and his most sanguine hopes realized. Whether these labours shall ever be resumed, must depend on the reception vouchsafed by the public to this first portion of the "*Kuzzilbash.*"*

* The word Kuzzilbash, which is Turkish, signifies "*Red-head,*" and was an appellation originally given by Shah Ismael the first, to seven tribes which were united and firmly bound to defend their king and the Sheah faith against all enemies and aggressors.—(*Vide* Malcolm's History of Persia, vol. i. page 502.) These tribes wore a red cap as a distinguishing mark, which afterwards became the military head-dress of the Persian troops—hence, the term Kuzzilbash is used to express a Persian soldier, and often, particularly among the Toorkomans and Oozbecks, is applied as a national designation to the people in general.

ADVENTURES

OF A

KUZZILBASH.

CHAPTER I.

In the name of the most merciful God, &c. &c. He who by virtue of his own experience teaches unthinking youth to avoid the snares which beset the path of life, is like a pilot to the frail bark in a tempestuous sea. "Such a man," saith the sage, "ranks next to a prophet." My beard is now white with the snow of age, my eyes are dim, and my arms have lost the vigour of youth: but the wisdom bought by many perils, may avail to warn the unwary from the snares of destruction, and teach them how to pluck the rose of safety from among the rude thorns of danger.

The counsels of a wise and valued friend induced me to accustom myself, from an early

age, to commit to writing an account of such remarkable occurrences as fell under my observation from time to time; and although the practice was frequently interrupted by indolence, or suspended from want of leisure, it yet became the means of fixing passing events upon the tablet of my memory, and enabled me to amuse the friends of my latter years, with the tales of days long since gone by. The resolution, however, which produced this detailed account of my life and adventures, did not originate entirely with myself.

It was after a conversation with the sage Meerza Haneefah, the profound Moollah Hoossain, and the witty, but sarcastic Wullee Khan, in which the subject of my early adventures had been discussed, when the free interchange of sentiment had excited our imaginations, and the confidence of friendship had expanded our hearts, that Meerza Haneefah exclaimed, "By the head of the Prophet! Ismael Khan, you who have witnessed so vast a portion of what passes in this changing world; who have been a great traveller and a valiant soldier, and whose acquaintance with men and things has been so great and so very extensive, ought not to allow your experience to be lost. You might write a history of your own times, and of your personal adventures, which would not yield in interest to the delightful

romance of Yussuff and Zuleika, or the Tale of Ferhaud and Shireen, as related by the poets, while it would possess the superior excellence of reality and truth."

"Excellent, indeed!" cried Wullee Khan; "the conduct and character of our friend Ismael Khan have, no doubt, been at all times so immaculate, that they may serve as models for the imitation of our youth, as a light to guide them in the narrow path of truth, virtue, and temperance!"

"And is the beacon which warns the gallant vessel of the hidden dangers in its track, of no value to the young adventurer on the stormy ocean of life?" demanded Moollah Hoossain, gravely; "and might not the narrative of such a life answer this purpose, and teach them to avoid the errors which so nearly proved fatal to our friend, and which daily effect the ruin of thousands?"

"My good friends," replied I, "I have not the vanity to think that the events of my life are so uncommon as to afford the amusement, or so instructive as to produce, by their relation, the good effects, you would suggest."

"You are mistaken," rejoined Moollah Hoossain; "real events thus related, like the fables of Lokman, illustrate the truth of sage doctrines, and fix a moral on the mind of youth more enduring than all the wise, but dull, lessons of our most orthodox teachers."

"Yes, yes! most profound and judicious Moollah," resumed Wullee Khan; "the *real events* which our friend would have to relate for the instruction and improvement of the rising generation, must, no doubt, be quite of a description to impress lessons of virtue on their minds; fit, no doubt, to be studied along with the precepts of the moral Saadi, or the elegant and captivating tales of Ul Jooinees Nigahrestan!—What indeed could be more improving than the narrative of a succession of atrocities; of war and plunder; of robbery and murder; of villages destroyed and women ravished:—a narration, in short, of that reckless, heartless life which we Persians always lead in troublesome times, and which we are at all times too prone to. I have been as bad as any one myself, but age, and some years of quiet, have brought me better thoughts;—I do not desire to see my children run in their father's early steps; and their proud young spirits, all agog for adventure, would be finely set on fire by such a wild narrative as Ismael Khan would have to give them."

"Barekillah! * Khan," cried I, somewhat nettled at this account of myself, "you make me out to be a fine fellow indeed!—a robber and a

* A Persian exclamation in constant colloquial use, literally signifying "Good God!" "Praise be to God!" but generally used as "Well done!" "Excellent!" &c., in English.

murderer, a ravisher of women, and a plunderer of villages! May your favour increase! I am ever your obliged slave!—But permit me to represent to your superior virtue, that, although in the heat and fervour of youth I have undoubtedly committed many acts of which I am now ashamed, yet a fair and just account of my life would not, I flatter myself, be deficient in the means of proving that I could occasionally remember the precepts of our holy faith, and could exercise discretion, self-denial, and charity."

"We have abundant proof of that already, my friend," observed Meerza Haneefah; "the anecdotes you have already related, which accord with the character you have gained among us here, sufficiently declare, that if you have often erred, you have also frequently shone as a pattern of integrity and praiseworthy forbearance: besides, the misery in which you sometimes were involved from misconduct, affords a valuable moral lesson. I am, in short, decidedly of opinion, that the work we have suggested would do greatly more good than harm: the well-disposed would certainly profit by it, while those who are inclined to evil, if they are not amended, will not be made worse by the perusal. As the poet well observes—'The bee will suck honey from the most noisome weeds; but feed the snake on peaches and

pomegranates, and lull it to sleep in a rose-bed, it will still produce nothing but poison.' "

Little more was said at this time, but the conversation sunk deep in my remembrance: in truth it gave consistence, if not being, to a thought that sometimes had flashed across my own brain. "Why," said I mentally, "should I not do as Meerza Haneefah has suggested? I am not, it is true, a man of letters; but a plain man may tell a plain story, and when my narrative is completed, my friends shall be made the judges of its value and utility; nor shall it see the light if they deem its tendency noxious:—so Insh-allah, Insh-allah!* I shall begin."

During the leisure which it was my happiness to enjoy for some years, I accordingly collected such journals and papers as I had preserved, and which had for the most part long lain by forgotten. There were many great intervals, but my memory was still good; and thanks be to Allah! my earthly pilgrimage has been prolonged to see the termination of my labours, which I now affectionately address to my children and their descendants; that they, through the blessing of Allah, may profit by the example and dear-bought experience of their father.

* "Please God!"

CHAPTER II.

BIRTH AND PARENTAGE OF THE KUZZILBASH.

I WAS born in the year of the Hegira 1119, (A. D. 1740) at Khojahdeh, the principal village of Karabulagh, a small district in the province of Khorasan, situated on the skirts of the mountains below Dereguz. My father, Moorteza Khan, was a chief of the Turkish tribe of Affshar, enjoying no small consideration and power; who resided in general in a fortified palace within the walls of that village. I can remember that he was a person of grave demeanour and warlike aspect, with a noble growth of beard, which won my infant admiration, and in which I would twist my little hands when he took me in his arms (and this he often did), listening with a smile to my childish prattle; for, though reserved and even stern to his dependents, he was a fond and indulgent parent.

Unlike the greater number of his countrymen,

he did not fill his harem with 'a crowd of women, but contented himself with two wives; of whom my mother, a lady of the Jalloyer tribe, was his favourite. By her he had four children; by the other, who was a Koord from Khabooshan, he had two.

My father was a man of too determined a character to admit of domestic brawls within his hearing—so that these two ladies continued to live together on very tolerable terms. The Koordish lady, whose temper was imperious and haughty, frequently sought, it is true, to gain an ascendency not only in the domestic arrangements, but also in my father's affections; but deeply attached to my mother (as frequently is the case with persons of very opposite characters), he constantly resisted these attempts, which only served to place in a more amiable light the mild and unobtrusive sweetness of his favourite wife.

I was the first fruit of their union, although I did not make my appearance until nearly three years after it had taken place. Few events of consequence come to pass in these countries without being preceded by omens of good or evil. To her family at least, my mother's first pregnancy was a circumstance of deep interest; and accordingly its issue was made the subject of a dream, which, as in most cases, left matters in greater anxiety and doubt than before.

My mother having fallen asleep one day after coming out of the bath, dreamed that the hour of her delivery was come, and that her bed was surrounded by the ancient females of the family, who watched with anxious and impatient looks, in hopes that the moment of birth should correspond with the fortunate minute predicted by a sage astrologer, who had been consulted on the occasion:—this coincidence, if it took place, was to insure to the child, good fortune, riches, and power; but any deviation was sure to entail upon her offspring misery and woe, in proportion to certain conditions, which, however, were left undeclared.

At length she thought her child was born; but she never had the happiness of beholding it—a noise and bustle arose, the company dispersed and fled in terror, and a dark, shadowy form seizing her infant, disappeared with it from her view. While wildly shrieking at her misfortune, but unable, as she thought, to stir from the spot where she lay, the vision changed, and various scenes of tumult and terror passed before her, in all of which one form, faint and indistinct indeed, but still the same, was constantly visible: she felt that it was her son; but when she tried to approach him the form vanished, or changed into wild chimeras that mocked her cries. Her struggles in these attempts at last awoke her, but the impression made on her imagination by this dream

was so powerful, that she resolved, without loss of time, to consult the old and learned astrologer of the village, who for half a century had been in the practice of providing its inhabitants with charms for their different ailments, and lucky hours for their various undertakings.

It happened that this venerable practitioner was not to be found at the time, and the lady, too uneasy to brook delay, was about to order search to be made for some other professor of the noble science of astrology, when the sound of a horn was heard without, succeeded by a voice, deeply and solemnly intonating certain of the prayers and exclamations commonly roared out, rather than recited, by dervishes and wandering fakeers.

Intent as was my mother's mind on reading the page of futurity, the arrival of such a personage at such a moment seemed to her like an interposition of Heaven itself;—nor was this impression lessened when, upon despatching one of her attendants for information regarding the stranger, she was met by others hurrying from the outer court to tell, that the person who thus announced his arrival was no other than Roushun-u-deen Sheikh Allee Calunder, * a dervish equally

* Sheikh is a term signifying "an old man," and is applied, not only to heads of tribes, but to men eminent for religion, austerity, and wisdom :—Calunders, Dervishes, Fakeers, are wandering religious beggars and fanatics.

celebrated for his profound wisdom, his great sanctity, and the mystery connected with his character and habits of life.

The Sheikh was believed to be a native of India, a land fertile in magicians and necromancers, as well as in saints and sages; but though the person and extraordinary attributes of this holy man were well known in Persia, and throughout all the east, no one in all these countries could give any account either of his family, the place of his birth, his age, or even of the way in which he lived and moved from place to place. Strange tales were told of his age, and of the power he possessed of transporting himself to great distances in an incredibly short time:—his appearance was that of a man in the prime of life, yet he had been known to speak of periods and events of very remote occurrence, as from his own knowledge, so that those who heard him were constrained to believe that his mortal span had been preternaturally extended. He was never seen to partake either of meat or drink, and a comparison of dates between travellers in countries widely distant, who each had met with this extraordinary person, reduced them to the perplexing dilemma of attributing to him the power of ubiquity, or of a miraculously rapid locomotion.

The Skeikh was believed to profess the tenets of that sect of religious sceptics called Sooffees;

but the rigid austerity and self-denial of his life, its blameless tenour, and the power of his eloquence in the mosques, when preaching to the people on the sublimer doctrines of their religion, all caused him to be looked upon as a worthy pillar of Islamism;—even the priests and Moollahs of the most celebrated shrines, though they hated and feared him for his extraordinary influence and endowments, did not dare to deny his claims to supereminent piety.

But the Sheikh possessed other and more powerful holds on the minds of the people at large. Intimately acquainted with the motions of the heavenly bodies, and their powers over and sympathies with the animal and vegetable worlds, he was a profound astrologer, he surpassed Aristotle as a philosopher, and Avicenna or Hippocrates in medical skill. The unerring certainty of his predictions, and the accuracy with which he decided upon lucky hours and minutes, together with the mystery in which much of his life and actions were shrouded, while they raised him almost to the rank of a prophet in popular estimation, caused him also to be regarded in some degree as a magician, and one possessing power over the genii and spirits of the elements:—what wonder then, that my mother's excited imagination should hail the arrival of such a person, at such a moment, as a special interposition of destiny? Men of such

holy stamp have always free access to every part of the household; and woe to that husband, father, or official, who should in any way impede the progress, or oppose the will of Sheikh Allee Calunder!

On being informed, by an attendant, of the pregnant lady's wish to see and converse with him, the Sheikh solemnly, and even mournfully, pronounced his blessing. "Peace be with thy lady, so long as Heaven wills it! the cares of her soul are known to me, and I come to soothe them; lead me straightway to her presence!" So saying, he followed the slave to my mother's apartment.

The Sheikh, it has already been said, appeared to be a man in his prime; scarce did he seem to have numbered thirty winters:—his hair, grown to immense length and thickness, was plaited and wreathed around his head like a lofty turban, and partially sprinkled with ashes; a few feathers of a pheasant, with a branch of the Arabian jasmine, were stuck fancifully on one side; two full, piercing, and deep-seated eyes, blazed from under brows of intense thought, above which rose his high and noble forehead; a finely formed and aquiline nose, gave dignity to his face, naturally of a graceful oval, but which now thin and care-worn, betokened the austerities of penance and abstinence; a large and handsome beard hung in undulating curls around his cheeks, and half concealed a mouth, which could fascinate by the sweetness of

its smile, or add terror to the dark frown of the brow.

The figure of the Sheikh was in harmony with his countenance: lofty, graceful, and nervous, it bespoke the power of the mind that animated, yet seemed to prey upon it; for his frame was wasted almost to emaciation. A tattered mantle, of various colours, formed but a scanty covering to the upper part of his body; a thin strip of cloth was wound around his loins; the skin of a tiger hung over his shoulders: on his feet he wore the wooden slippers common to dervishes; and in his hand he bore a stick of ebony, with a crooked crutch-like handle, on which, when seated in meditation, he could rest his arm, and to which many people attributed much of his supposed magical power.

The Sheikh, as he entered the room, at the upper end of which my mother was seated upon a cushion, solemnly uttered the salutation of peace, in the name of God and his prophet; and seating himself opposite to her, remained for more than a minute bending his keen eyes mournfully on her countenance. No one ventured to interrupt this silence, till the Dervish himself at length spoke as follows:—"Daughter! the angels of good and of evil are alike the messengers of Allah, and both must be received with meekness and humility; learn, then, to bend with resignation to his will,

that the blessings which his goodness bestows may not elevate thee unduly, nor the sorrows he permits to assail thee in this vale of tears, weigh too heavily on thy soul. Thou hast dreamed a dream, which indeed has in part imaged to thy sleeping mind the future destiny of thyself and of thy offspring. Thy soul shall be gladdened by the birth of a son, but thy joy shall not long endure. He will be lost to thee before his youthful energies have attained maturity; many perils, much of adversity and various adventure shall he experience, but it will be to surmount them all; for more of good than of evil fortune is written on his forehead, and his star shines brightly though it be environed with many baleful influences! But here the veil is dropt, and Heaven in mercy to its creatures, denies the dangerous gratification of perfect foreknowledge. Be satisfied then, my daughter, with the promised good fortune of thy son, and seek no farther to pry into his destiny or thy own: be sure that, if thou dost, evil will result from the attempt. My task is now ended, and, for the present, thou seest me no more. May God protect thee!" So saying, the Sheikh arose, and quitted the apartment slowly as he had entered it, leaving all who had witnessed this extraordinary interview too much bewildered to think of stopping, or even addressing him: and whether the attendants without had held careless watch was never known, but

none of them observed the Sheikh quit the fort, or even the village, nor was he heard of any more at this period.

My mother, for some time after this event, continued so much a prey to anxiety, that her health was much affected; but the representations of her most attached friends, and the revival of hope, as the painful impressions of her dream and the Dervish's visit wore off, succeeded in quieting her apprehensions. The period of her confinement at length arrived, and I was ushered into this world of care to the unutterable joy of my mother, the happiness of my father, and the satisfaction of the house in general.

But the scene which took place around her during her confinement, brought vividly to my mother's recollection her painful dream. There were the old women, as anxious in reality as they had been in imagination, about the propitious moment of the infant's birth; the deviation proved considerable, but under circumstances so equivocal, that the most learned of the gossips in the science of astrology were quite at fault in deciding as to the chances of good or evil fortune to the child; and my mother's anxiety was so painfully revived, that, forgetting the Dervish's caution, she determined to consult the village astrologer, and endeavour to extract some comfort from his predictions on the subject.

It was, however, in vain; the old man, after calling to his assistance the profoundest problems he was master of, declared, that an influence over which he had no power, baffled all his attempts, and spread an impenetrable veil over my future fate: thus my mother was forced to submit to a second disappointment.

It happened that, after her recovery, when, according to custom, she proceeded to the bath, from some accidental cause, she was induced to use the village Hummaums, instead of the private ones in her husband's palace. In turning down the narrow and retired lane which led to these, accompanied by her female attendants, her course was arrested by the appearance of a figure in the garb of a Dervish, whose lofty figure and commanding voice proclaimed at once the Sheikh Allee Calunder. "Infatuated woman!" said he, as the party with one accord stopped, and with suspended breath drank in his words: "miserable and unhappy! why didst thou disregard my solemn warning? Know that thy fatal curiosity has drawn ruin upon thee! and dearly shalt thou pay for thy presumptuous, but abortive attempt, to penetrate the secret will of Heaven!"

For a while the women, all stupified with terror, were unable to utter a word! At last, my mother, observing that the Sheikh was about to retire, summoned force to exclaim, "Alas! holy

Dervish, take pity on the anxiety of a mother; remember how much cause she had for alarm: nor condemn her too eager desire to learn with more distinctness the fate of her son! Forgive my fault, and pray that Allah may forgive it likewise; and be sure that rich alms shall flow from my husband's treasures to the shrines of Mushed and Kerbela:* whither it is my intention to make a pilgrimage, as soon as circumstances shall permit me to leave my family!"

"Daughter," replied the Sheikh, severely, "remember the sin of the first woman; recollect its punishment, and think not lightly of thy fault. To me it was entrusted to warn thee of thy danger —to me it falls to denounce the punishment of thy disobedience—to Allah, and to his prophet, humble thyself, and endeavour to avert the heaviest weight of those disasters which otherwise will surely overwhelm thee. Seek not again to penetrate the hidden things of fate, but rather strive to prepare the mind of thy son for what that chequered fate may be; teach him patience and firmness in the hour of adversity; gratitude and moderation in prosperity: and as the hardiest plants are nursed among the rocks, avoid undue

* Mushed, the burying-place of Imaum Reza, the Eighth Imaum of the Sheah Mahometans, who was poisoned at Toos in Khorasan, by Mamoon, son of Caliph Haroon-ul-Rasheed. *Kerbelah*, the mausoleum of Hussun and Hossein the sons of Allee, murdered at that place by the soldiers of Yezid.

indulgence, and seek to strengthen his body, as well as his mind, by healthful exercise and wholesome toil. By such conduct seek to appease the wrath of Allah, and shun the storm which threatens to burst upon thy head. Me thou shalt see no more."—So saying, the Sheikh passed on, and soon disappeared.

For some time my mother was in despair at this mysterious denunciation of wrath; but, as no misfortune occurred immediately, and as I throve to her heart's content, the impression wore off by degrees. Her gossips and attendants sought to quiet her fears by sundry pithy arguments:—"That a lady of her rank was to be punished, or even threatened with punishment, for a little natural, nay, praiseworthy curiosity!—how extravagant an idea!—and at the will or word of a beggarly fakeer too! it was too ridiculous! It was only a pity that her husband's furoshes* had not been called on to lay hold of and bastinado the impostor into more civil and comfortable terms." In short, so much was said and done about the matter, that my mother was roused to throw off the feelings of dismay which ever and anon would weigh upon her heart; and she was so successful at last, that even her pious intentions were shaken off along with her alarm, the alms forgotten, and the pilgrimages put off from month to month, and

* Tent-pitchers and sweepers.

then from year to year, till the vow and its original cause waxed faint as a shadow without form or substance, or like the sahrab* of the Desert, which ever flits from the approach of the thirsty traveller.

Meantime I grew up a great favourite with my father, and in due time a brother and two sisters were added to the family; while the Koordish lady, who was introduced into the harem a year after my mother, presented the Khan with two boys.

* Sahrab, water of the desert—the mirage.

CHAPTER III.

FIRST ADVENTURES.

THE lands and village of my father were situated on the borders of the great desert which stretches from the banks of the Koolzum (or Caspian) Sea, to those of the river Oxus: they were consequently much exposed to the incursions of the Oozbecks and Toorkoman tribes that wander over it, and who at this period, in the feeble days of Persia, ravaged Khorasan with impunity, from Serrukhs and Mushed, even to the borders of Irak.* In other days, my father, who was a warrior of no mean name, would often muster his dependents, and lead them to attack and plunder these enemies, even in their own camps: but times had changed; the character of the nation had fallen with that of its sovereign,—the good, but weak Shah Hoossein,—into an effeminacy that portended its downfall; and these marauders had in conse-

* The central and principal province of Persia.

quence become so daring, that many towns and villages on the skirts of the mountains bordering the Desert, had already become their prey; and my father was forced to content himself with merely repelling attacks, instead of making them as formerly.

The Toorkoman tribe of Tekeh, supported by the Oozbecks of Khyvah, had become particularly daring in our neighbourhood; they had even approached so close as to surprise and plunder a small village belonging to my father, not many miles from his dwelling. But he, hearing of the outrage, collected some of his most trusty adherents, and pursuing the robbers, overtook them when off their guard, during their first night's halt. Disregarding the disparity of numbers, he took advantage of their confusion, charged them, —cut a great many to pieces, killed one of their principal chiefs; released all the captives they had taken, and returned home with many prisoners. This feat repressed for a while the boldness of the Toorkomans, but it created in them a thirst for vengeance, never to be quenched but in his blood.

For some months every thing remained in quiet, but after that time rumours began to be circulated, that small parties of the Toorkomans had been observed lurking among some ruined villages, and

in the ravines in our neighbourhood; and intelligence having at length arrived, that one of these had approached nearer than usual to our village, my father, summoning his best soldiers, left home one evening in hopes of surprising them. The night passed, not without anxiety;—but little did any of the family dream of the fate that was hanging over them.

In the grey of the morning the sound of horse was heard, and the watchmen on the walls gave notice that the Khan was approaching. The gates were immediately thrown open, and several of the inhabitants, both men and women, went out to meet their friends, returning, as they hoped, successful, and laden with booty. But they were soon terribly undeceived; for, as the foremost of the troop came near enough to be recognised, the unhappy villagers descried the wild features of their Toorkoman foes, scowling from under the Kuzzilbash caps and turbans. A loud scream of affright told their enemies that they were discovered, and instantly spurring their horses to full speed, they pursued the flying wretches, making way with their swords to right and left, and entered the gates almost before the alarm had reached the few guards who remained on duty. All who attempted resistance were cut to pieces in a moment, while a party of the villains, dashing

forward to my father's fortified palace, seized on the gates, which were beset with fugitives, before they could be effectually closed.

Young as I then was, I can yet remember well the shrieks of horror and despair that arose as the Toorkomans, with their huge rough caps and hideous countenances, all smeared with dust and blood, burst into the private apartments:—the yell of agony and frantic entreaty that burst from the old women and eunuchs, as some of the stern savages hewed them in pieces, while others seized on the younger females and children, still seems to ring in my ears. The nurse, who had tended me from infancy, was speared by two ruffians as I clung to her, adding my cries to hers, and I was covered with her blood. Child as I was, this outrage roused my puny wrath, and, drawing the little dagger which was thrust into my girdle, I dashed it against one of the murderers, who instantly raised his spear with an oath, and would have pinned me to the ground; but his companion struck the weapon aside with his sword, crying "Hold, hold! harm not the child! He is a brave fellow, and I shall keep him to attend upon my little Selim."

In the mean time others seized my mother, who only thought of protecting her younger children; but they tore them from her arms, and throwing

them screaming upon the slaughtered bodies of her servants, hurried her along with all the younger females beyond the walls of the fort. According to their custom on such occasions, they carefully forbore to encumber their retreat with any whose old age, or extreme youth, might retard them on the march, or who were not likely to fetch a high price as slaves: all such they mercilessly slaughtered; and, as they dragged us along, we could see the work of death going on: we heard the shrieks, and trod on the mangled remains of our friends and relatives.

At length the pillage was complete; they gathered together their prisoners and plunder, bound the latter hastily upon the camels and other cattle belonging to the village, and led them forth from the gates. Some of the young females were placed upon camels; others were seated and secured behind their ravishers. My mother, whose beauty, in spite of her despair, was so great as to attract the notice of the same person who had saved my life, and who proved to be a chief of some consequence, was accommodated with a camel, and placed under the special care of a trusty attendant: my efforts and entreaties to get near her were also attended to, and I was seated with her upon the same animal. But all the male, and many of the stronger female prisoners, having their elbows pinioned be-

hind them, and being secured by a rope to the saddles of the horsemen, were forced to follow on foot.

The signal was now given, and the whole party moved rapidly forward. Loud cries of despair arose on every side as we left behind us our desolate bloody homes, and saw the hope which was still entertained by many, of rescue by the Khan's party, fast failing. Alas! we soon learned that his fate had been the prelude to our own. Anxious to discover the enemy, he had divided his force, at first but small, into two parties, in order to scour the country more effectually; and had unfortunately fallen in with their principal body closely ambushed. He was surrounded and fiercely attacked, almost before he saw his danger; the greater number of his people were killed around him, and he himself was speared from behind, while defending himself against three of his enemies. It was the dresses of our unfortunate friends that had been so successfully used to deceive the watchmen of our village; and in our progress onward, we had the additional misery of marching through the pass where the disaster had taken place, strewed with their stript and mangled bodies. My poor mother first learned the full extent of her misfortune, from seeing her husband's well-known sash and turban on one of her guards: it was her death-blow.

The wail and lamentation which accompanied the first part of our progress, subsided, by degrees, into stifled sobs and silent despair, as we toiled along after our captors, who, regardless of the weakness or weariness of their prisoners, urged on their horses, dragging the poor wretches forcibly along, goading them with the butt ends of their lances, and scarce giving them time to rise, when pain or accident brought them to the ground. Several of them gave up in despair, long before the evening of that dreadful day, and yielded up their lives under the spears of the Toorkomans; indeed, our course might have been traced by the carcases of men and cattle, and the shreds of goods, or bales of merchandize, abandoned in the rapidity of our retreat; for the robbers well knew that the alarm would soon be general, and made great exertions to get beyond all danger of pursuit.

My mother for a long while lay almost insensible upon the pile of clothes which had been placed upon the camel for her accommodation, clasping me ever and anon with a convulsive shudder to her heart, but neither uttering a word nor shedding a tear. Her lips, as she sometimes pressed them to my face, were parched and burning; and her eyes wild, but sunk in their sockets, resembled those of a dying person. Towards evening she became more tranquil, and at length addressed me by my name. "Ismael, Janee!* my dear boy,

* Janee, "my life!"—A Persian expression of affection.

thy mother is dying, the Angel of Death is at hand; and I thank Allah that he has permitted me so soon to follow your father. I have this day witnessed the ruin of our house, the slaughter of our family, and the murder of my beloved husband; the blow that reunites me to them is merciful, and I am truly grateful for the boon;—but you, my child, your fate distracts me with apprehension, and gives me the only pang I feel in quitting this earth. Yet who can read the book of fate? the same destiny that preserved your life this morning when all your family perished, may still watch over and preserve it, to raise the fallen fortunes of your house, and to take a signal revenge on its destroyers." I could only answer with my tears; my mother's deathlike looks distressed and appalled me, and though her words sunk into my memory I could with difficulty follow their sense. "Ismael!" she continued, "my dear orphan boy, listen to the dying words of your mother. Child though you are, you have heard the circumstances connected with your birth—alas! could I have foreseen the cruel fulfilment of those prophetic warnings! Know that your future fate and fortune are chiefly in your own hands; happiness and prosperity may be yours, but it will depend on your own prudence and forbearance to render them permanent. Restrain your passions, my child, and taking warning by your mother's fate, submit

the longings of indiscreet curiosity to the restraint of moderation and reason. Forget not, Ismael, the faith of your fathers! Never abandon the tenets and doctrines of the Sheah* persuasion. Keep in mind your noble descent; remember that you hold your lineage from the tribe of Affshar, faithful to their friends, terrible to their enemies. You are now unhappily in the power of the last, and must bend to the storm that cannot be resisted. But fortune, like a morning of spring, soon changes from dark to bright; the star of your destiny may yet shine forth, and the murderers of your father and your family may in their turn eat the bitter fruit of their ruthless deeds from your hand. One thing more keep in your memory:—the sage who obscurely foretold your fortune, and whose denunciation against me I now see fulfilled in this calamity—the holy Sheikh Allee Calunder surely still exists: seek him, my son, and make his counsels the guide of your steps: your mother has too certain proof that they

* It is generally known that the religion of Islam is divided into two principal sects: the followers of *Omar*, and those of *Allee*. The former consider Omar to have been the legitimate successor of the Prophet, as God's vicegerent upon earth. The latter attribute that distinction to Allee, the son-in-law and friend of Mahomet; and many a bloody war has been the consequence of this difference in religious opinion. For particulars regarding these two sects, D'Herbelot, Chardin, and Malcolm's History of Persia may be consulted.

are true as the words of fate; as such receive them —would I had done so!"

In this way my mother continued to impress me with her last counsels, as often as her weakness would permit; and the greater part of her words, spoken under circumstances so painful and peculiar, made, it may easily be imagined, an indelible impression on my young mind.

At last the weary march concluded; the Toorkomans found it impossible to urge on either prisoners or cattle farther; rest and food were absolutely necessary. A hollow among some sand-hills, where a few wells afforded a supply of water, served for our encamping ground, and the whole party, captors and captives, gladly obeyed the order to halt, and sought a short relief from their misery or fatigue, in sleep. Not quietly, however, were the poor captives permitted to sink to repose: the task of unloading the camels, of rubbing down and tending the horses, of whom upon a march the Toorkomans are always more careful than of themselves, was forced upon the wearied wretches.

Their captors, in the mean time, seizing on such of the camels as had sunk under their loads, and well knowing they would never rise again, cut their throats, and speedily dissecting the carcases distributed them among their party. Fires were made of such dry weeds and cattle-

dung as could be collected, at which the meat, cut in pieces, was scorched rather than roasted, an arrow serving in place of a spit. Happy were those among the female captives, whose youth or beauty had found favour in the eyes of their masters, for it procured them a slender share of this rude feast; while others, who more required it, were forced to be content with a morsel of dry bread and drop of muddy water; and even this did not fall to the lot of all.

When the meal was finished, preparations were made for sleep, and for securing the prisoners. A circle was formed by the Toorkomans, within which the former were placed, along with the cattle and the baggage: and those who were thought likely to attempt escaping in the night were pinned down by a horse-cloth thrown over them, on either end of which lay one of these guards, thus preventing the possibility of their stirring. Sentries were then placed on every side, and the whole party were permitted to take repose as best they could.

A melancholy resting-place it was, indeed: even at this distance of time I shudder to think of the miseries of that night—of all that live-long day. I have witnessed many a scene of blood and horror since that time, and each, in succession, has faded more or less from my memory with passing years; but the impressions made on my young

mind by the occurrences of this hideous day, never have and never can be effaced.

Some of the poor captives, overcome with fatigue, but of powerful athletic frames, sunk at once to sleep of the profoundest kind: others, in whom grief struggled with weariness, groaned and wept long ere they were relieved by sleep. But there were many whose strength, exerted to the uttermost, now totally gave way, and they sank exhausted on the ground, to rise no more;—to these no sleep came—a restless moaning continued for a while, but in the morning they were found dead and stiffened with the cold, just where they lay down.

Of this number was my hapless mother. The chief, Omer Khan by name, who had preserved both her and me, had directed such attendance to be given as could easily be rendered by one of his followers; and the man, to do him justice, did not neglect his master's orders. But it was too late—the food which was offered she rejected, giving her portion to me, whose appetite was by no means injured, either by the long march or by grief, and who readily accepted all that was offered me. Her strength was quite gone, her voice failed, and she was unable to express her anxiety and affection, otherwise than by clasping me convulsively to her breast as I lay beside her. Pained and alarmed by her silence, I called loudly on her to speak to

me, and cried bitterly at her continued inattention. At length, in a low uncertain tone, I heard her exclaim, " My child ! my child !—Allah, Allah !" while her arms seemed to seek me, and her eyes were half closed and sightless:—as I turned to embrace her, her arms dropped powerless from me, a groan escaped her lips, and she remained motionless. Ignorant of the change that had taken place, I tried to rouse her, and to attract her attention by caresses, but finding all in vain, I was struck with a strange alarm, and wept aloud. By this time all around me had sunk to rest, and my cries were quite unheeded; nature, exhausted at last, gave way, and I dropped into a heavy sleep upon the dead body of my mother.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TOORKOMAN CAMP.

The camp was in motion before morning dawned, and I was roused from my melancholy couch by the attendant who had charge of my mother and myself. He soon discovered that all was over with her, and finding me wet with the heavy dew, and stiff with cold, he thought that I had shared her fate, and went to report the circumstance to his master. Omer Khan, disappointed at the double loss, came up to examine into the fact, and arrived just in time to see me, who had been roused by the efforts of his servant, stretching myself, and again attempting to awaken my mother. "Take the boy away," said he; "the woman is gone: leave her where she lies, and let the boy still ride on the same camel as yesterday —come, despatch!" But when they told me that my mother was dead, and attempted to carry me from the body, the violence of my grief was so great

that it affected even the rough chief who had taken charge of me; he patted me on the head, bade me be of good cheer, promised that he would take care of me, and left me to his servant Hamet, with a strict charge of kind treatment and attention.

Hamet was fortunately a good-natured fellow; he soothed me with wonderful patience, and when he found that all would not do, he lifted me without farther ceremony from where I lay, and placed me screaming upon the camel which had been prepared for my mother and myself. What became of her body the wild beasts and ravens of the Desert can tell; but Hamet took from around her neck a talisman, consisting of a small silver box, in which was a cornelian stone engraved with some mystical characters, and a piece of paper inscribed with some verses from the Koran; this he threw over my neck to please me:—it attracted my attention and quieted me for the moment, and it has been my companion ever since.

We quitted our halting-place just after the hour of morning prayer, which was duly performed; and we marched forward into the Desert, leaving behind us many of our fellow-prisoners along with my unfortunate mother. Peace be to their dust! may their souls drink in the pure joys of Paradise!—they early left this weary pil-

grimage, and escaped from many sorrows, and the long cheerless captivity which awaited the survivors.

The day passed on in the same fatiguing exertion as the last, and like it had its victims; for though the nights were piercingly cold, the sun was so powerful in the day-time, that the sands of the Desert sent forth a burning heat. Luckily for the wretched prisoners, the rapidity of our progress was as fatal to the cattle as to human life, and our captors were induced to relax in their rate of speed, in order to secure as much as possible of the booty with which these cattle were loaded; had it not been for this, few of the prisoners could have held out at all. But, indeed, as the danger of pursuit abated, the Toorkomans themselves were disposed to move at an easier rate, and though the second day's journey was extremely painful, the third and following ones became gradually less so.

As for me, although I had by no means become insensible to the loss of my mother, yet as the fatigue fell but lightly in comparison on me, and as my friend Hamet was kind, and gave me nearly enough of food, which though coarse was made palatable by hunger, I got reconciled to my condition, and only now and then inquired "when we should reach *home*."

It was on the eighth day of our march, having

left far upon our right the ancient city of Merve, which spreads its ruins in a wilderness, like Tadmor of the Desert, that, emerging from a long track of low sand-hills, void of the smallest vegetation, we looked down upon a green stripe of country, through which, among beds of reeds, stole a sluggish river. The stream occasionally swelled out into a small marshy lake, and its blue waters gave a freshness and beauty to the spot, the more delightful from its contrast with the sterility around it.

The river was bordered on each side by meadows, yielding excellent pasture; and though, at this season, the grass had lost some portion of its verdure, it still furnished abundant food to numerous herds of cattle that strayed amongst it. Groups of tents, black from their covering of coarse felt, were sprinkled here and there, and, even at a distance, we could discern their inhabitants moving among them, or sitting at the doors of their respective habitations: every thing announced that we had reached our journey's end—that we had arrived at the Toorkoman camp.

No sooner had the advance of our party issued from among the sand-hills, than they were observed by the scouts of the camp, who are generally stationed in positions from whence they may see and give notice of any coming danger; and who, observing us, set up a loud yell, which occasioned

multitudes to issue from the tents, with eager and anxious enquiry. But a shrill, peculiar cry, from our party, instantly changed the warning voice of the guards into a joyful shout, and the alarm of the camp into loud clamours of congratulation. Men, women, and children, poured tumultuously from the nearer aouls,* to meet us, and the air resounded with loud screams of joy, mingled with exclamations of reply to the watch-words of our party.

Still we pressed forward, and gained the banks of the river, where now and then a few stunted broken trees might be seen dipping their roots in its waters, and affording some scanty shade.

After a pretty long course, we reached the residence of Hyder Bey, the chief, who had headed this enterprise, and in front of it the party halted, surrounded by increasing crowds from the neighbouring aouls, all eager to hear the news, and learn the particulars of their countrymen's exploits.

The wild and characteristic scene which ensued, made an impression upon me not easily described. Here were multitudes of the savage Toorkomans, whom I had been taught to hate, if not to fear, clad in coarse wrapping gowns, scarcely girded round their bodies, and their huge rough caps, with their wild broad features, and little angular

* Aoul, or Oolous,—a subdivision of a tribe or camp; a Turkish word.

eyes, lighted up with uncouth joy, all clamorously congratulating their countrymen on their good fortune in capturing or destroying so many of us poor Kuzzilbashes: and the women, with their flat Calmuck faces set off by enormous head-dresses hung all over with gold or silver coins, their hair in long plaits, hanging behind and on either side the head, twisted with silver bells and buttons, came running in their loose flowing shifts to meet their husbands or sons, and screaming out enquiries as to the booty they had brought.

The party that had arrived, on the other hand, were busy bringing up the prisoners and baggage, unloading the beasts of burthen, and arranging their captives; who, worn out, squalid, and almost naked, awaited their fate in mute despondency. The loud shrill tones of enquiry, the yells of congratulation and joy, the shrieks of distress from those who now for the first time learned that they had lost relatives—tones of exultation, expostulation, quarrelling, and abuse, mingling with the bells of the camels, the execrations of their drivers, and fifty other indescribable sounds, in one stupifying din, formed a striking contrast to the silent and motionless misery of the wretched captives. Through the kindness of my good friend Hamet, I had suffered so little for some days, and had been so well treated on the whole, that my fears had in great measure given way,

and I rather enjoyed the novelties that passed under my observation; but the show was now over, and my destiny was soon to be decided.

The family of Hyder Beg, consisting of his father, a withered old man, with a few long white bristles for a beard, and eyes almost invisible among the wrinkles of his cheeks and brow,—his mother, an old crone, like a half-animated corpse in a brown parchment skin, with sundry women and children, rushed out to meet him, clinging round him, and taking his horse, his arms, and accoutrements from him with affectionate zeal; and he soon disappeared with them into his tent. A similar reception awaited Omer Khan, my master and protector, who, after the first congratulations were over, spying me perched on the top of my camel, called to Hamet to take me down, and carry me into the inner tent, where was his favourite wife. "Here, Khanum,"* cried he, "I have brought you a young Kuzzilbash to attend upon your little Selim, and be his playfellow: he is a brave little fellow too,—he would fairly have put me to death, if he had but had strength enough, in defence of his old fool of a nurse; and I don't doubt his turning out an excellent hand at a chappow:†—take him, and be kind to him."

* Khanum is the feminine of Khan, Lord—and signifies Lady, the wife of a Khan.

† A chappow is a plundering expedition, the nature of which will hereafter be more particularly explained.

The lady, whose face, though downright Calmuck in features, was full of good-humour and vivacity, received me very graciously; and seeing that I was shy, and that my heart was full—for the thought of my own mother came across my mind with a renewed feeling of bitterness—she took me by the hand, bade me welcome and fear nothing, and, calling to one of her women, sent her to bring her son, little Selim, to her immediately.

Selim was a tall boy, nearly two years older than myself, well made and handsome, though his features partook somewhat of the Calmuck cast of his mother; he was strong and active, and already could ride a horse, and draw his little bow, with any one of his years in the camp. Great was his delight when his father told him that he had brought a little servant for him from among the Kuzzilbash dogs;—"and a fine little ghourumsaug * it is," added Omer Khan, "and a brave one he 'll be if he lives."

"But what can he do, father?" cried Selim, casting his keen, but good-humoured eyes over my anxious countenance and dishevelled dress; "he looks as if he still cried after his mother!

* Ghourumsaug is a Turkish word of abuse, which may be translated by the English word "Scoundrel," although its literal meaning is even still more gross—it is in very frequent use where Turkish is spoken, and sometimes, as here, is used jocularly.

Can he ride a horse, or shoot a bow? or does he know how to run, or leap?—Well, at any rate, he can run and pick up my arrows, and in time I will teach him better things."

"Child," observed his mother, "the poor boy is tired and hungry; take him and give him part of your supper and bed, and to-morrow you shall see what he can do, and teach him what you please."

Selim now took me by the hand, and led me to an apartment behind the principal tent, where there were several women and children huddled together. Here was novelty and variety enough to engage my attention, if I had been in a mood for amusement:—what a contrast was this rude tent to all I had ever before seen in the shape of a habitation! Instead of a neatly-finished, well-carpeted apartment, the wicker-walls of this den, covered with black felt, were hung with all the trash and litter peculiar to a Toorkoman tent:—old pack-saddles and camels' furniture; leather-bags for holding milk and churning butter; cooking-pots, broken wooden-platters; a drum made of a hollowed wooden-block, covered with a piece of sheepskin; bags of dried curds* and of wool, bladders filled with tallow and with butter, old

* The curds, expressed from the milk, or butter-milk, are often dried in the sun, and preserved thus. They are broken small, and, mixed with water, form a pleasant acidulous beverage.

boots and piles of sheepskins, lay heaped in every corner, soliciting attention in the semi-obscurity of the place; while from the ends of the wooden wickerwork of the walls hung sheepskin jackets, fur-caps, women's shifts and head-dresses, tattered trowsers, bows and arrows, swords and spears, in all imaginable confusion. Already, too, had part of the plunder of our village mingled with it; and shawls, turbans, caps, silken-shirts and trowsers, cloaks and slippers, with calleeoons and metal-platters, basins and ewers, bits of broken looking-glass, ornamented boxes, and many other things of the kind, were now subjected to a very curious scrutiny by one part of the women and children, while some of the female menials of the family were employed in working carpets in a loom at one end of the tent, and others laboured at shaking the milk in a leathern bag to extract the butter from it.

My entrance gave a turn to their curiosity; women and children gathered round me in a moment, and beset me with a thousand questions, to which I paid no attention whatever: a sense of forlornness rose to my heart, and, clinging close to Selim, I could not repress my tears; and fain would have shrunk into a dark corner to sob out the bitterness of my feelings. It was at this moment that I spied an urchin, of about my own age, decorated with the well-known shawl which had

been my father's turban; the same that had been taken from his murdered body to serve his murderers as a disguise, and the sight of which had so fatally affected my poor mother.

Bursting with indignation, I sprang from the side of Selim, and, aiming a furious blow at the little wretch, seized and secured the shawl from his clutches, before he dreamed of the attack. A loud scream was instantly set up by the child, and echoed by all the women. "Wullah!"* "The kuzzilbash dog!" "the cursed imp of Satan!" "What news is this!" "Ah, the ghorumsaug! seize him, beat him, kill him!" "What devil is this that has got among us?" cried all speaking together, and, seconding their torrents of abuse by actions, they assaulted me at once,—even Selim turned to me with an eye of fire; but, dashing some of them from me, and eluding the rest as well as I could, while I held my prize above my head, and my cheeks glowed with anger and excitement, "It is my father's turban," exclaimed I, "and no one shall have it—no one shall get it from me!"

"Well done, my little fellow," cried Selim in his turn, his anger giving place to a smile of approbation; "keep the shawl, and no one shall take it from you—no one shall touch you or it, while I am your master."

* An oath or exclamation equivalent to, Heavens!—by God!

With these words he dispersed the grumbling children; and, in spite of the angry efforts of the women, he led me clear off to his own corner of the tent, where, after sharing with me a hearty supper of soup, thickened with barley-bread and well seasoned with garlic, with plenty of butter-milk and water to drink, we retired to sleep upon a parcel of felts, having a warm sheep-skin pelisse to cover us; nor did I awake until the noise of the cattle and the bustle of morning aroused my companion and myself to the business of the day.

CHAPTER V.

THE CHUSHMAH JEMALLEE.

THE encamping ground of the aoul* to which my master Omer Khan belonged, was pleasant in itself, and particularly grateful when contrasted with the wide extent of desert around it. The banks of the river on which it was situated, had once been well inhabited, and thickly sprinkled with towns, villages and gardens, for a considerable extent both below and above the city of Merve; but these were now all in ruins, and, for a considerable distance round the city, totally uninhabited, except by marauders, who took shelter among them for the purposes of concealment and plunder.

Beyond, and farther removed into the Desert, these ruins served as points of rendezvous, and permanent encampments for the Toorkoman tribes, who formed them into strongholds for storing their

* See page 48.

booty and protecting their wives and families in case of attack. The vicinity of the stream, too, gave encouragement to some of the more industrious among them to cultivate a little ground; for, wherever water could be procured, a rich crop of corn or fruits, as water-melons, cucumbers, and the like, was sure to reward the husbandman.

It was at such an establishment we had now arrived. Ruins of considerable extent, but quite overgrown with rank grass and weeds, announced that a village of no mean size had once existed here. A small square inclosure of sun-dried brick, probably at one time that of a fortified palace, with towers at each corner, had been so far repaired as to render it proof against any surprise either by horse or foot, and in this were formed several depôts of goods belonging to the chiefs and richer individuals of the tribe: a few shops constituted a Bazar, and there was also sufficient space to contain the women and children, with a considerable part of the cattle of the aoul in case of danger.

But the Toorkomans always prefer their black tents to any other habitation; and these were scattered about in groups usually forming a square, having behind them inclosures made of split reeds, to contain their cattle at nights. Many of these squares were very pleasantly placed; for a few straggling trees indicating where orchards

once stood, were scattered about; and banks, overgrown with rich vegetation, offered shelter from the wind, and at certain times of the day a shade from the fierce rays of the sun.

In one place, the river, which sometimes was hardly visible among the reeds, took a sweep beneath a shoulder of the bank rather higher than the rest, and swelled out into a little lake; a white sandy beach of twenty or thirty yards in length bounded its waters at the foot of this bank, which rose above it covered with green turf. Nearly in the centre of this beach, a spring of clear cold water, which took its rise some hundred yards off, under a rock, fell into the lake. So tempting a spot had not been neglected in days of yore: the spring, from its source to the margin of the lake, had been inclosed within a garden, which, to judge by its remains, must have belonged to some powerful prince. One tradition attributed it to Afrasiab*—another, with more probability, referred it to the time of the first Caliphs. Much care had, at all events, been taken to embellish the garden; canals, with stone cisterns, had once adorned it, and fountains might be traced, which scattered the pure waters of the stream around to cool the air. A great many stumps, for the most part quite decayed, but some

* A king of Tartary celebrated in the Shah-Nameh, of Ferdousee.

of which still threw out a few sickly shoots, proved that groves of orange, pomegranate and other fruit trees, once flourished here, and long slender runners of the vine still crept among the tangled weeds.

Just upon the edge of the bank, the little stream, after filling a canal, had been trained to fall over an artificial cascade of stone, the sides of which had been adorned with ornaments of the same; but the canal was almost obliterated, and the stone over which the water rushed was broken, and had fallen in such a manner as to confine the stream still more. A rude spout of stone had been placed so as to collect it in the basin below, and to enable the women to fill their water-vessels more easily. A huge old sycamore tree, once the chief ornament of the garden, grew on one side and overshadowed the basin; and a vine, which had rooted itself among the broken stones, formed a still closer covering, protecting the water from the rays of the sun, so as to render it always cool and refreshing. It was a delicious spot, and had become the favourite rendezvous of the whole aoul: the women came morning and evening to fill their water-skins; the elders of the men met to smoke their calleeoons* under

* Pipes, on the principle of the Indian hookah, but having only a wooden stalk, instead of a snake, for smoking tobacco through water.

the shade, and the youths to talk over their exploits performed or anticipated, to play at games of chance, and listen to the tales of a Kissago,* or to gossip with the women; the children sported below upon the green bank, or threw themselves into the sparkling waters of the little lake at its foot. A more delightful scene of pastoral and patriarchal happiness after a rude fashion, than this spot exhibited, cannot be conceived; nor could it have been readily credited that the men, who, when mounted and armed for plunder, were so stern and ruthless, wading through blood, and sparing neither age nor sex, were the same who now sat happy and harmless with their families beneath the old sycamore, at the quiet Chushmah Jemallee.† Such was the place to which I was now conveyed, where most of my boyish years were passed, and the recollection of which I cannot even now recall without emotions of the most lively tenderness. Around, for many miles, lay the meadows where the tribe pastured their flocks and herds until the grass was nearly exhausted; after which, the greater part of the camp moved along with the cattle to other places affording more abundant herbage.

From this time forward I became one of the

* A professional teller of stories and romances, common over all the East.

† The "Fountain of beauty."

family; the good-humoured Omer Khan was constant in his rough and boisterous kindness to the child whose life he had preserved; and Selim, his son, became so fond of me that he would seldom let me quit his sight. He took a pride in teaching me all that he himself had learned, consisting principally of athletic exercises, riding, using the spear, the bow and arrow, and the scymetar, or Persian sword; at all of which weapons my young master was so expert, that before he had attained his fourteenth year, few could compete with him in their use. His horse, taught to obey the least sound of his voice or movement of his body, seconded his master's address so well, that his spear never failed of striking the point he aimed at, and turned so swiftly from the shock, that his adversary was ever disappointed of his revenge. It was taught to take part in every combat, and to assist its master's efforts with its heels and teeth. From its back, his arrows were discharged with the most unerring skill; seldom did he miss the brazen basin hung from the highest pole; and he marked with infallible precision the smallest opening in his opponent's coat-of-mail. The ball of wetted cotton, the turban of twisted cloth, the thickest hide, and the toughest-scaled fish, alike gave way before the address with which he wielded his keen-edged scymetar. Every one predicted that Selim Beg would be the pride and

the champion of his tribe. I was his apt pupil, and many a hearty "Barick illah" did my close and steady emulation of his exploits call forth from the old Oostade,* who had been his early tutor, and who still continued his instructions to us both. Envy or jealousy were not in the noble nature of Selim Beg; and the nearer I approached to his own adroitness, the more he loved and caressed me. Thus, though in station I remained a slave in the house of my master, like other captives of my nation, my condition in reality was happy and comfortable. If the refinements and luxuries, adopted in the houses of the Persian khans were not to be met with here, there was at least kindness and cordiality, hospitality and plenty.

The lot of my unfortunate fellow-captives was very different from mine. After being allowed to rest a very few days, that they might recruit a little from the fatigues of their last severe march, during which time they were scantily fed with barley-bread and a little milk, they were distributed, according to the claims of the captors, in various ways. Some remained for a while among the different aouls, employed either in herding camels, or in cultivating the earth; but the far greater portion were sent farther north into the Desert, both in order to place them more beyond

* Oostade, a master; a teacher of any profession.

the possibility of escape, and to be nearer the slave-markets in the Oozbeck states, from whence merchants came periodically to purchase such captives. The women were chiefly placed, either as concubines or slaves, in the harems of the chiefs, where probably they consoled themselves for their misfortunes, in the enjoyment of that influence which the superior beauty of Persian women frequently secures to captives of that nation over their Toorkoman lords.

I saw but few of these captives again: one or two of those who had fallen to the lot of persons in the neighbouring aouls, and who remained with them until sold to slave-merchants, used to recognize me, and would repeat to me, when opportunity offered, many of the circumstances connected with our common misfortune, or would entreat me to use the influence I was supposed to possess with the Khan, my master, for indulgence, or for pardon, as might be required; but these, one after another, all disappeared. One woman alone lived for a longer time in the aoul, and to her it was in a great measure owing that I retained so exact a recollection of my family and early misfortunes, and that I continued in the faith of my ancestors a zealous Sheah. This woman had belonged to my father's household; and although, in consequence of her being but little employed about the person of my mother or her children, I had known

her but slightly, when I saw her soon after our arrival at the aoul, and recognized her as one of my own people, I flew to her with uncontrollable delight, and burst into a passion of tears on her bosom. The poor creature was hardly less affected, and ever after, while she lived, which was but for a few years, she sought opportunities of seeing me,—an indulgence which, to say the truth, was by no means prohibited,—and delighted to converse with me on all that had passed—on my family and rights—on what I had once been, and what I was now reduced to.

Her own misfortune was severe enough; she had been dragged from her husband and family, from a condition of ease and comfort, to one of solitary servitude and toil; for, being neither young nor beautiful, no harem opened its gates to receive her—hard menial labour was her lot: and though, in other respects, not harshly treated, she became the drudge of a whole family, who did not spare her toil. Thus, her mind became embittered to the present as she dwelt upon the past; she hated the authors of her misery, and sought to cherish in my young breast an equally lasting and violent sentiment. She painted to me the atrocities of the dreadful day which cut off our family and clan from among the living; she reminded me of my murdered father, and the words of my dying mother; and she charged me never to lose sight of

the revenge which I was bound to exact for the slaughter of my parents. Above all, she conjured me, by every sacred name, "never to forget that I had been born and bred in the only true faith, a worthy Sheah, a follower of Allee, the only lawful successor of the Prophet,—blessed be his name! —I was now," she reminded me, "in the land of Soonnies, these dogs, worse even than infidels," (and she spit in holy abhorrence, as in duty bound,)— "to desert the faith of my fathers would be the worst of all disgrace, besides being the most certain path to perdition;" and her zeal had an earnestness, and her expressions an emphasis, in enforcing these injunctions, which co-operating with the charges of my dying mother, impressed the subject on my mind too powerfully ever to be effaced. It was an appeal to pride and constancy which had its effect on my youthful heart, even before I could comprehend the merits of the question,—(as, praise be to Allah and the Prophet! I now fully do)—and enabled me to withstand all the attempts that were afterwards made to seduce me from the true faith.

This honest creature not only explained to me, as well as she was able,—which, it is true, was not very intelligibly—the nature of the difference between the two great sects of Islamism, (if indeed the heretic Soonnies can properly be included in that blessed religion,) but she taught, and particu-

larly insisted on the very important differences observed between them in the forms of prayer and other rituals; charging me, as I valued the joys of paradise, as I hoped to drink from its rivers of delicious milk, and bask in the glances of its dark-eyed Houris, never to cease cursing Omar, Abubekr, Moaviah, and all the usurper's tribe,—never to use the abominable attitudes of the Soonnies, nor keep my arms hanging down during the time of prayer, nor in my ablutions to wash the hands and arms from the fingers upward, as these heretics do, which is causing impurity to flow from the extremities towards the nobler parts; and, thanks to Allee and the Twelve Imaums! their servant has adhered most strictly to her instructions. The death of this excellent creature was a misfortune which I keenly felt; for it was like cutting the last tie that bound me to my country and family.

One part of her injunctions, however, I never could obey: she classed among her enemies and my own, the whole Toorkoman race, without exception; and would have wished, good soul! that the lives of every one of them could have been crammed into one chest, and the key delivered into her hand—little mercy would they have received, Heaven knows!—nay even my master and preserver she would not except from her general thirst of vengeance. But though she possessed the power of exciting my childish wrath to a vow of hatred

and revenge against those who had destroyed my family and clan, I never could be brought to include in this denunciation a single member of the family of Omer Khan. They were to me a second kindred; for I felt that I had been cherished by them as if I were indeed their son. In truth, the vow itself was a delusion, like the obligation of some imaginary hereditary duty, for the sentiments that gave rise to it, in time died entirely away: yet, strange as it may appear, this visionary duty continued still to weigh upon my heart, and, like the traditions of past ages, grew stronger, though less definite with the lapse of time.

CHAPTER VI.

SHIREEN.

THUS passed my days calmly and happily. The station of the aoul was chiefly at the Chushmah Jemallee: but once in the course of the year's revolution, it generally moved over the Desert for a while to other pastures, that our corn might have liberty to ripen, undisturbed by the cattle, and our favourite meadows to recover their customary rich herbage. The quiet of our lives was sometimes interrupted by an incursion from a neighbouring state or tribe, and chappows, or plundering expeditions, were undertaken, as prospect of advantage tempted our chiefs. A few individuals were destroyed, and many prisoners, with a due proportion of booty, were pretty regularly brought into camp; but no serious misfortune was experienced by this division of the tribe, nor did any change of consequence occur for several years.

But though, in general, I was treated with a

kindness which left little difference between me and a child of the family, there were occasions on which I became forced to remember that I was but a slave. More than once, in moments of pride and thoughtlessness, forgetting my true condition from the lightness of my chain, I fell into serious disputes with young persons of the tribe, and even of my master's family; and I suffered severe rebukes from Omer Khan in consequence. On such occasions, my friend and companion Selim Beg would generously step forward and assert my innocence, or insist upon my right to defend my character and repel insults. But his father or mother would reply, "You forget, my son, that he is but a Kuzzilbash—a miserable Sheah: *he* must not forget himself, however indulgent *we* may be."

It was after I had been more than four years an inmate and servant in the tent of Omer Khan, that I experienced a check of this description, more painful to my feelings than any thing that had occurred since the commencement of my captivity. In the family of Omer Khan there had once been a Persian captive, taken in a plundering expedition that had extended almost to the gates of Nishapour.* She was of the tribe of Beiaut, young and beautiful, and had fallen to the lot of

* A celebrated city of Khorasan, near which are the finest, if not the only Toorquoise mines in the world.

Omer Khan, who immediately placed her in his harem, and became so fond of her that he raised her to the rank of one of his wives. In due time she presented him with a daughter, lovely as a child of the Peris; but she died soon after giving it birth. The child was taken in charge by the Khan's principal wife, the mother of Selim Beg, who perhaps was not sorry to be rid of such a rival in her husband's affections; and it became a great favourite with its adopted mother as well as its father. It grew apace, and surpassed in beauty, as well as in sweetness of disposition, all the children of the aoul.

This little girl was about three years younger than myself, and for some time she attracted my attention no more than any of the other children in the family. It happened, however, about two years after my arrival, that several of the children of the aoul, among whom was the little Shireen, were running and playing about, upon the green banks of the little stream, close to the lake. They rolled and tumbled, and pushed each other into the water, or splashed it in one another's faces, as the fancy seized them; when an awkward, turbulent boy, observing that the little girl kept timidly aloof from the roughest of the sport, came suddenly behind her, and pushed her so rudely that she fell into a deep part of the water, where, confused with the shock, she floundered about unable to get

out. The rest stood apart laughing or amazed, so that the poor little creature might have been drowned outright, had it not happened that I was passing toward the tents, and startled by the noise came running to see what was the matter. I instantly plunged in, and seizing hold of the poor sufferer carried her to the bank; nor did I quit her, till, soothed and recovered from her terror, I led her carefully to her father's tent. This circumstance created an interest for the child in my mind which I had never felt before, and which was fostered and increased by the lively gratitude she evinced towards me ever afterward. In all her little griefs and vexations she would fly to me for sympathy and relief; her manner to me was full of affection and confidence, nor did I fail of returning to her the kindness which she bestowed upon me.

The fondness which I felt for Shireen was by no means lessened, as I beheld her increase in years and stature, and as the charms of childhood began to mature, giving promise of the perfect beauty to be expected from the full-grown woman. Yet I had never thought of her but as a sister, as a child of the family which had adopted and brought me up; and all my conversation and conduct towards her were directed by that feeling. Perhaps, indeed, the unrestrained freedom of intercourse which had grown up between all the

members of the family and myself, led me too much to forget my true condition, and laid the foundation of future humiliation.

One day, when many of the children of the camp had met in the cool of the evening to enjoy their little sports, and we had all engaged in a game which represented the attack of a chappow upon an enemy's village, I conceived that Shireen, who performed the part of a captive, was too familiarly and roughly handled by a lad about my own age and size, the son of a petty chief of the same tribe; and my displeasure was augmented by the idea that Shireen herself did not by any means repel, as I thought she should have done, his odious familiarities. After repressing my impatience for some time with great difficulty, it at last broke forth rudely enough: I seized the lad, and threw him violently to some distance, while, taking Shireen by the hand, I attempted to lead her from the place. But she, resenting my interference, and perhaps vexed at the game being broken up, with more anger than I thought she could have assumed, broke from me; and bursting into tears, demanded what I meant by thus insulting her. "Insulting *you*, Shireen!" exclaimed I, confounded; "I was only protecting you, as is my duty, from the insults of that ruffian yonder, whose impertinence I wonder you can bear." "And who gave you a right to wonder at or

judge of my conduct?" cried the little girl, her eyes glittering with anger through the tears that stood in them; "how came you, you Kuzzilbash slave, to interfere with me, or presume to tell me who I am or who I am not to play with?" By this time the youth, who had recovered himself, came up and joined in the clamour, without daring to strike me, for he had already felt the force of my arm. He poured out the grossest abuse upon me; called me slave, unbeliever, dog, a scoundrel who should be impaled alive, for my insolence in presuming to lay hands on the son of a Toorkoman chief. He ended by bidding me know my proper station and go about my business, nor dare to mingle with such as they, nor meddle again with what I had nothing to do with, or it should cost me dear.

Thunderstruck at the anger of Shireen, unjust as I thought it, and stunned by the torrent of abusive epithets, which placed my unfortunate situation so bitterly before me, I could not utter a word in reply; but turning a look of deep reproach upon her who had so long been my affectionate companion, I left the place, and hurried to our tent; where, casting myself on the ground in a corner, I gave loose to the tears that could no longer be repressed, and wept bitterly.

The next morning I found that my conduct had been canvassed by several members of the family, to whom the childish quarrel of the pre-

vious evening had been related; and that the Khan's wife, who, though kind and good to me in general, was fond of keeping every one in their own place, had blamed me severely, and concluded that the reproaches of Shireen and her young companion were just. My friend and master, Selim Beg, on the contrary, true to his affectionate bias in my favour, loudly advocated my cause, accused them both of ungenerous petulance, and declared that they both deserved to be severely punished for it.

It appeared too, that the little Shireen herself, after her burst of vexation at being so familiarly and even rudely treated by a slave, in the midst of her companions, had subsided, had sorely repented of her unreasonable anger, and was ready to break her heart on recollecting the pain she had given to one whom she loved as a friend. Nor was her distress lessened on seeing me the next day, with swollen and downcast eyes, turn from all intercourse with the family, avoiding her in particular, and betaking me silently to the duties which I usually had to perform. She did not venture to address me, but viewed me with side-long looks and brimful eyes, earnestly watching for an opportunity of reconciliation. But my feelings had been too severely wounded, and my heart was too proud to yield at once to these pacific overtures. "The slave," thought I, "now knows his

distance, and shall keep it; he requires no more such checks to his presumption, as he met with yesterday;" and I turned indignantly away.

These high-wrought feelings continued for many days, in spite of the soothings and solicitations of the kind Selim Beg, who, by every generous attention, sought to calm my wounded spirit, to reconcile me to my condition, and bring me back to the social terms on which I had formerly lived with the whole family. His well-meant efforts were not in vain: youth easily accommodates itself to circumstances, and rises buoyant over the misfortunes that threaten to overwhelm it. By degrees my natural gaiety returned; I resumed the routine of exercises and amusements, as well as duties; I met the individuals of the family, and even those who had witnessed the affront I had received, without shrinking or blushing with shame; and need I say that the silent but earnest efforts of the gentle Shireen to effect a reconciliation were no longer repulsed.

One day, in the course of her little domestic duties, she was attempting to lift and carry a load beyond her strength; I was passing by, and paused a moment to look upon her: it was the first time I had ventured to do so since our quarrel, and, doubtless, my face expressed less harshness than before; for Shireen, looking timidly at me, and then casting her eyes on the ground,

said, almost in a whisper, "There was once a time when Ismael would not have stood idly by while Shireen was in distress." I could resist no farther: "Let me try, Shireen, and I will carry your burthen for you;" and taking it up I walked away with it. She followed me, and when I had deposited it where it was required, I turned to her, and saw her eyes full of tears. "Shireen!" said I, "have you forgiven the offence committed against you by a wretched slave?" She could contain no longer. "Oh, Ismael!" cried she, running and throwing her arms around me and sobbing violently, "miserable wretch that I am, how could I be so wicked, so ungrateful! What could tempt me to distress and injure my faithful companion, my best friend? But, indeed, I never, never can do so again:—forgive me, dearest Ismael; forgive your little Shireen!" Who could have resisted such an appeal?—certainly not a boy like me; I returned her caresses, wiped her eyes, and swore to be ever her guardian and protector, the most faithful and attached of her slaves.

From this time an affection of the strongest and tenderest nature grew up and increased in my heart for Shireen:—she became the object of my fondest and most anxious solicitude; I watched over her steps, her wants, her health, as a mother does over those of her child, and could scarcely bear her to be out of my sight. Nor did

this affection continue long without return:—Shireen, eager to make amends for her fault, took every opportunity of giving me proofs of her gratitude, believing that the emotion she felt proceeded from that source alone. Yet, young as she was, female delicacy, in the course of time, taught her to restrain her feelings; and her affection was rather to be detected in kind looks and silent attentions, than manifested in any more palpable shape.

Children almost as we still were in years, it may seem absurd to translate our early feelings into the language of passion; but I rather relate the impressions which those days have left, than the feelings themselves as they were developed at the time. It was doubtless the tenderness of our years that rendered the parents of Shireen indifferent to all that was going on;—the singular attachment of the little girl to the young Kuzzilbash slave, and his devoted attention to her, were remarked, it is true, by all; but they no more entertained suspicion of improper consequences, than they would have suspected that slave of hatching a plot to destroy the whole tribe.

It may possibly appear strange and improbable to many of my countrymen, that a slave, even favoured as I was, could enjoy such uninterrupted opportunities of intercourse with a daughter of the family, or that the children of different

sexes, at ages so far advanced, should be permitted to be so constantly together. But it must be remembered, that the strict seclusion in which other nations professing Islamism hold their females, in obedience to the injunctions of the Prophet—(to whose name be praise!)—is by no means practised among the Toorkomans, or indeed among the wandering tribes of any country. On the contrary, their women employ themselves constantly in the domestic duties of the family, which lead them, both out of doors and within, to mingle with the men; and this without wearing any sort of veil, unless it be a small piece of silk, which sometimes is hung before the mouth and chin. Indeed, moving about, as they constantly do, exposed to all the inclemency of seasons and all the inconvenience of an unsettled habitation, it would be impossible for them to observe the scrupulous delicacy which separates the sexes in fixed communities; nay, they go quite into the other extreme, and rival in their habits all that is told us of the freedom permitted to their women by the Franks of the West.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CHAPPOW.

Years rolled on. Hyder Beg, the chief of our aoul, had fallen in a plundering expedition against a village near Khabooshan, and Omer Khan was recognized as the person of greatest importance remaining; for the Toorkomans possess too restless a spirit of independence to place themselves nominally under the control of any particular chief. Each head of a family, in proportion as he acquires riches by his courage and wisdom, becomes a chief of more or less consequence, without any direct assertion of his authority; on the contrary, such an attempt would be apt to prove the ruin of his hopes.

Omer Khan was rich, his family was large, and his courage and address in leading the tribe on plundering parties was so remarkable, that, without possessing any great superiority of intellect, his influence in the aoul became extensive

The high promise of his son Selim Beg, now fast growing into manhood, had a powerful effect in his father's favour; for the tribe saw in him a leader likely to surpass the father in talents and prowess. Already had he, at his earnest entreaty, been permitted to accompany a small party on an expedition of some peril; and the readiness with which he bore all privations and fatigue, the high spirit of enterprize, and the sagacity he had evinced in suggesting and assisting in the execution of plans for the success of the adventure, had surprised the best and oldest warriors of the party.

There was, in truth, at this time sufficient scope for enterprizes of such a nature. The kingdom of Persia was distracted by the troubles consequent upon the Affghan conquest. Ashruff, their leader and prince, held sway over almost the whole southern provinces. Malek Mahmood Seistance had erected the standard of rebellion in Mushed, and overawed a great part of Khorasan; while Shah Tahmaseb, the last nominal monarch of the Suffavean dynasty, was still acknowledged in Mazunderan, Astrabad, and some few other places.

While Ashruff found it difficult enough to maintain himself in the south, and Malek Mahmood was struggling hard with his opponents around Mushed, the northern and border districts of Khorasan, torn to pieces by the jarring interests

of a multitude of petty chiefs, all striving for independence, lay open to the inroads of the Oozbecks of Bockhara and Kyvah, who, with the Toorkomans of the Desert, ravaged all the borders, and threatened Mushed itself. The Tekeh tribe were not slow to take advantage of this state of things, and, either in company with its protectors of Kyvah, or alone, upon its own account, was continually on the alert, carrying terror and desolation even to the gates of Nishapore and Subzawar.*

Though sufficiently desirous of permission to make a display of my prowess, I was thought too young to accompany my master, Selim Beg; but Omer Khan, who was pleased with the spirit I displayed, promised that when I should have completed my sixteenth year, I should be permitted to accompany the party, and make my first essay in arms. To this period, accordingly, I looked forward with inexpressible impatience. I could not, it is true, forget that I was a Persian, a native of the very country against which we were to carry arms; but I had now almost become a Tekeh in feeling; the terms on which I had lived with my protectors had been such as to transfer to them a great part of my filial sentiments, and I burned to approve myself worthy of their regard. Besides, this was the only way in which I could acquire such distinction as might wipe out the

* Cities of importance in Khorasan.

unhappy stain attached to the situation in which I was placed. It never failed to recur to me with a pang, that I was a slave;—but then slaves, by dint of their abilities and courage, often rose to the highest stations, and I was bold enough to think myself not deficient in these qualities—why, then, might not I also succeed? Ambition began to stir in my heart, and I felt the desire of moving in a higher sphere than that which our little camp could afford.

Whatever scruples I might have entertained regarding the field in which I was likely to begin my military career, they were removed at the time when my period of probation was about to expire, by a hostile call in another quarter.

A feud of long standing between our tribe and that of the Eersanees, tributaries to the Oozbecks of Bockhara, broke out afresh, and with a violence that foreboded a fierce and bloody war. This feud, which had originated in and been kept up by a series of murders, robberies, and reprisals on both sides, had for some years sunk into a surly neutrality, which had in a great measure thrown each party off its guard.

About this time a small camp of Tekehs, among whom were several families intimately connected with our aoul, in ranging through the Desert to change their pastures, and near the confines of their usual bounds, fell in with a party of

Eersanees returning from an unsuccessful chappow. The provocation, if there was any, remained unknown: perhaps a few taunts might have exasperated the unsuccessful marauders; perhaps they were rendered more than ordinarily savage by their disappointment: however that might be, they set upon the Tekehs, who consisted mostly of women and children, incumbered with cattle and baggage, and by no means prepared for such an assault. The few men defended themselves as well as they could, but fell one by one, rather than submit to the fate they foresaw for the survivors. The women and children were bound as captives on the cattle, and hurried off with unsparing rapidity to the most distant haunts of the tribe, where they were distributed as slaves, never to be released or heard of by their friends.

When the news of this disaster reached our camp, it filled every one with horror and with rage. The ferment was dreadful; vows of vengeance were succeeded by the most energetic preparations. The elders met in council, while the rest got in readiness for the expedition, which they could not doubt would be decided on; for the feelings of hatred and rage were too deep and universal to leave any chance of moderate, far less of pacific councils. Orders were immediately issued for every man able to carry arms to prepare

for marching; expresses bearing a like import were dispatched to all the camps in the neighbourhood; and within six hours after the arrival of the intelligence, three hundred men, well mounted and armed, with provisions sufficient for eight days, awaited but the signal to leave the camp.

I was one of that number; necessity came in aid of my urgent petition, and I was permitted to attend my young friend and master, Selim Beg, upon this my first campaign.

While busily hurrying about, collecting the few necessaries which, besides his arms, a Toorkoman carries to the field, I almost ran against my dear Shireen, who, hearing the bustle, and learning its cause, had thrown herself in the way to meet me. Her cheek was pale, and her eyes swam in tears. "Ah," said she, "Ismael, and so you are going with my brother Selim on this chappow?"—"Yes, Shireen, this day your slave commences his career as a soldier, and, Insh-allah!* it shall also be the first step to honours and freedom. You shall have a freeman, and a Beg or a Khan, Shireen, for your servant, instead of the poor captive Ismael."—"Ah, Ismael, see that in seeking these honours you do not lose your life;—what can you, a mere boy, inexperienced in arms,

* Insh-allah!—"Please God!"—an expression in constant and universal use in Persia.

expect to do against these fierce Eersanees, that have slaughtered so many of our friends! Oh, how I wish you were returned from this vile business! But what if you were; you would only return to set out on some other hateful chappow, till at last you get killed like my poor cousin Hassan. Why, why, cannot we still be children—still play together by the dear Chushmah Jemallee? Alas, these days never, never can return!"—"Nay," replied I, "Shireen, do not thus forbode evil:—you know that the old astrologer, Oong Beg, has predicted great success with little loss,—be of good cheer, then; I shall return, Insh-allah, and bring you a little Eersanee for a slave." A loud shout, intimating the arrival of fresh horsemen, forced me to break off. I offered to salute Shireen, but she, bursting into a passion of tears, threw her arms around me and sobbed upon my breast. At any other time the sight would, perhaps, have overthrown my resotion, but I was too highly excited at the moment to think of any thing but glory, and plunder, and slaughter. So I carried Shireen into the tent, kissed and pressed her to my heart, gently disengaged myself from her arms, and hurried to the place of rendezvous.

Here all was eagerness and bustle. The men were buckling on the harness of their steeds, which were neighing, kicking, and pawing the

ground with impatience. One was still busy fitting a spear-head to its shaft; another cramming an extra number of arrows into his quiver; some were binding up the scanty supply of barley-cakes, and grape-treacle,* or dried cheese, that was to support themselves and their horses upon the march; others putting on such pieces of mail as they possessed, or adapting their dress to the purposes of active exertion and sufficient defence from cold. But the greater number, already equipped, stood by their steeds, or were seated in the saddle, cursing the tediousness of those whose incomplete preparations still detained them.

Around and among the troops, the women moved hurriedly about, dealing out the necessaries of accoutrements or provision to their husbands, their sons, or their brothers. Most of the females, well-accustomed to such occasions, performed these offices quietly, as matters of course. But there were others, whose pale faces and uncertain steps betrayed their terror and anxiety, and proclaimed that they were agitated by newly awakened interests of the tenderest nature for some among the band.

At length the whole, mounted and arrayed, awaited but the signal for moving. Many a gal-

* The juice of grapes, boiled to a thick jelly, forms a very common article of food on all warlike expeditions, as it contains much nourishment in small bulk.

lant army have I seen since then, and I have fought in many a desperate field, brightened with victory or saddened by defeat; but though these may fade from my memory or leave but confused recollections behind, I never can forget this day, when the career of military adventure was first opened to my view, bringing along with it the hope of freedom, and honour, and rapid advancement. As I vaulted on the gallant horse which my patron had provided for me, I felt as if the whole Desert around was too confined for my course, and it required all my powers of forbearance to control the exuberance of my spirits, and withhold me from giving spurs to my steed and bounding headlong onward. The wise may smile at my boyish extravagance, but they will forgive it: I was but sixteen, and felt myself enrolled among men for the first time, armed and mounted for manly duty.

Our cavalcade, after all, though it dazzled my unpractised eyes, would have made but a poor appearance compared with that of regularly organized troops. A few of the best and wealthiest of our men were indeed clothed in shirts of mail, composed of steel and brass links interwoven together; with a steel cap, fitting close to the head, from which hung down flaps of the same linked mail, intended to defend the neck and shoulders. Some, instead of the linked mail, wore four plates

of steel, embossed with various ornaments, and laced on the back, breast, and sides; thus serving to defend the greater part of the body. And those who could boast of a complete suit, added armlets of steel, ending in flexible gloves of steel scales lined with thick quilting. These were accounted as the champions of our troop, who, like a forlorn hope, were bound to take the post of danger on all occasions: but few, on the whole, were thus defended. Some wore gowns thickly quilted with silk and cotton, which formed a sufficient defence against the blow of a sword. But the greater part had no defensive armour except the talismans, which almost every one wore in profusion, bound round his arms or hung about his neck; all of which had been procured from such dervishes or great astrologers as chance had thrown in their way while travelling through the Desert. Such are deemed of infinite use by many; —for my own part, I neither affirm nor deny their value, although I have more than once seen poor fellows, trusting to the efficacy of their talismans, have their heads cloven by the sabre of an Affghaun, or dashed to pieces by the ball of a Turkish cannon. But then, no doubt it was their fate, and who can contend against fate?

Our offensive arms consisted principally of the spear, a sharp three or four cornered head of steel, fastened on a slender but tough and flexible shaft,

from eight to ten feet long, in the use of which the Toorkomans are very expert; and when, dropping the reins, they leave their well-trained steeds to be regulated by their voice or the inclination of the body, and grasp the spear in both hands, shifting it with the rapidity of lightning from one side to the other, it is difficult either to avoid or withstand their shock. Every man also bore a bow, made of the horns of an animal and braced with its sinews, very strong and elastic:—all were trained to discharge their arrows with unerring aim from horseback; and such was the force with which they were delivered, that few coats of mail could withstand them when shot from a moderate distance. Besides these, most of the party carried scymetars of the fabric of Herát or Mushed, some of high value, which, in the hand of a powerful man, could sever a buffalo's head from its body at a blow, and have been known to cut an ass in two, with so little apparent effort, that the animal would remain for some time standing as it was when it received the stroke.* Some of our men hung an iron mace, or a staff heavily loaded with iron, at their saddle bow, and all wore the khunjur, or common dagger, at their waists.

Such was the general description of our array;—

* The feat of cutting an ass in two at a blow, is said even now to be sometimes performed in Persia—the rest of the story savours of the Persian turn for the marvellous.

but though a captain of Nadir's well-trained Kuzzilbashes might have smiled at the appearance and accoutrements of our party, he would have been struck with admiration at the manner in which they were mounted. Full two thirds of the whole sat on horses of sixteen hands high, whose large bone, clean limbs, and muscular frames proclaimed their strength and activity, as the hardness of their somewhat scanty flesh, the sleekness and gloss of their coats, the brightness and fire of their eyes, and the quick quivering motion of their ears when they tossed their heads aloft and pawed the ground with their feet, declared the excellence of their condition and high spirit. There was not one of these horses but would have performed a journey of five hundred miles in five days,* and each was trained after the Toorkoman fashion, to fight for his master, and seize his enemy with his teeth. The remaining horses were stout Yaboos,† or galloways, of fourteen hands high, less beautiful, and less swift than the larger and high-bred horses, but perfect in the essentials of strength, and powers of endurance.

* This may seem an extravagant and improbable assertion, but it is borne out by authentic accounts of the extraordinary marches which even in these times are performed by the Toorkoman and Persian horses.

† The name given in Persia to pack-horses, or ponies, of almost every size, which do not rank under the more dignified title of "Asp," *i. e.* Horse.

Such was the party that now, with eyes sparkling impatiently from under their huge fur caps, waited but the signal for marching. But this important step depended on the decision of Oong Beg the astrologer, who, assisted by one or two other professors of the same valuable science, with astrolabe in hand, was busy ascertaining the height of the sun, and the position of the heavenly bodies, in order to declare the lucky moment for departure. It arrived at last: and the old man, raising his voice, announced the auspicious conjunction. — Omer Khan instantly galloped to the head of the troop, followed by his son, and several of his chosen attendants, of whom I was one; and uttering a loud shout, away we rode, each caracolling and bounding in the fulness of his spirits, as his horse chose to carry him. This irregular movement, however, was soon exchanged for a steadier and graver pace;—the horses seemed to be aware that they had serious work to perform, and the whole party soon fell into the usual quick walk, or rather pace, at which the Toorkomans travel on such expeditions, and which carries them on about five miles an hour. As we passed by other camps on the river side, we were joined by fresh parties, and before night closed in, our force amounted to full five hundred men.

At the hour of evening prayer, a halt was called, during which, after performing our devo-

tions, we administered a very sparing feed to our horses, eating still more moderately ourselves; and after two hours' rest, we again mounted and pursued our march. We now quitted the course of the river, and struck into the Desert more to the eastward:—it was important to avoid all observation, and particularly so to keep clear of Merve and the tribes encamped around it, from whence the alarm, if once taken, might soon be communicated to our intended victims, and our own retreat very probably cut off. In this manner, we travelled all night, keeping our course chiefly by the stars, and by certain land-marks, only known to the more experienced of our troops.

In the morning we halted again; said our prayers, fed our horses, and refreshed ourselves at some wells discovered by our guides, but which, being partly filled up with rubbish, would have escaped our notice without their aid. After the usual short rest, we resumed our march through a country consisting principally of sand-hills, interspersed with hard, sun-dried, clayey plains, or low flats covered with saline efflorescence. No vegetation was to be seen, and it was with difficulty that a sufficient supply of bitter brackish water could be procured, to enable our horses and ourselves to pursue our journey.

We continued our course, tending rather more to the southward, for another night and day, by

which time it was judged that we were not far from the object of our expedition. We had left Merve and its river far on the right, and had approached that part of the Desert bordering on the district of Andkooee,* near which lay the haunts of the tribe that had injured us. This night we did not venture to advance far; but, detaching some small scouting parties for information, we placed sentinels around, and lay down to sleep until the dawn of day.

Morning had not broken long ere our scouts returned, and reported, that though we were still too far from the aoul which was our object, to discover any traces of its inhabitants, they had nevertheless ascertained our exact position, and reckoned upon the next night for completing our enterprize. We now once more advanced:—the greatest caution was adopted to conceal our approach from the devoted victims of our revenge; one or two horsemen were sent in advance, and others thrown out on each flank, to give the earliest notice of any symptom of habitations.

At length one of the advanced guard came

* Andkooee is a town situated in a district of the same name, belonging to the province of Balkh, the ancient Bactria. It is about sixty or seventy miles distant from the ancient and ruined city of Balkh, and the same from the banks of the Oxus; it contains 1500 or 2000 houses, is surrounded by many camps of Toorkomans and other wandering tribes, and is situated on the borders of the Desert.

galloping back at speed, upon which we all halted. He told us that a smoke had been observed at a distance, which was believed to proceed from the Eersanee camp, and that traces of cattle could be seen in the sand. We were now travelling in a sandy track, varied with undulating hills of the same nature. They rose rather higher upon the left; and one of our guides assured us that just beyond them we should find a chain of low moist spots, where water might be procured, and grass also, if it had not already been eaten bare off the ground by the cattle of our enemies. Our scouts pressed forward to ascertain that this desirable place of ambush was unoccupied; and the expected signal being soon made, we all filed to the left, down a slight descent, and found ourselves suddenly in a spot which, contrasted with the scorched-up barrenness through which we had marched, might have been termed fertile and beautiful. The hills rising around, formed a natural hollow or inclosure, of a mile and a half long by half that extent in width; an emerald tint covered the whole of this space, except in the centre, where there was a muddy pond, at times evidently filled with water, though now dry, and in which holes had been dug to procure that indispensable necessary of life. That this spot had been lately occupied, was evident from the traces of cattle every where visible, and it was

equally manifest that it had been abandoned in consequence of the pasture being quite exhausted. It was, nevertheless, a most desirable spot for our halt; and our half-famished horses made a shift still to crop a very comfortable regale, while their riders, having posted sentinels on the heights, threw themselves on the ground to take a short rest.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CHAPPOW, CONTINUED.

THE sun had set, and the moon, fast completing her second quarter, shone full upon us before the word was given to mount and set forward. During the daylight, every one had examined his arms; repaired the damages incident to a long march; and fitting his harness and accoutrements for immediate use, had prepared himself, as well as circumstances would allow, for the chances of a desperate struggle: and when we once more resumed our march, every one knew that before we could again seek repose, or dismount from our steeds, the event of that struggle must be decided. Except to myself, however, and perhaps to one or two more raw hands, I do not believe that a reflection of the kind occurred; the rest were all too well inured to blood and danger, and too confident of success from the excellent arrangement of their measures, to think of any thing but victory and

revenge; but we, who for the first time in our lives were to measure our strength in earnest against a powerful enemy, could not entirely restrain the yearnings which Nature in such circumstances experiences.

We marched in perfect silence. However disorderly a body of Toorkomans may be on ordinary occasions, a sense of common interest restrains the most turbulent on enterprizes like the present. Nothing was now to be heard but the tread of the horses, and now and then a faint clash of arms. Every man seemed now to hold his breath, and grasped his quiver and his bow, that their rattle might not betray them. At length the faint bark of a dog was heard by the horsemen in advance, and the whole party was once more halted. The night was more than half-spent, but the plan of our leaders was not to attack the camp till the earliest dawn, that our people might have the full advantage of their enemies' surprise, without any risk of those mistakes which night attacks so often produce. The principal camps were calculated to be still four miles distant; so we continued full two hours in this anxious situation, without daring to advance nearer, for fear of giving the alarm.

About three in the morning, we once more got into motion: the moon was setting, and a deep gloom fell around; but the quick eyes of our

leaders could detect the first flush of the false dawn* in the East. As we rode along, this appearance vanished; but soon a broader light extended itself gradually from the horizon to the zenith, and objects at a little distance became visible. Our band was now separated into two divisions; one of which filed off to the left, while that with which I remained kept straight onward. Presently dark lines of low objects could be discerned, still at a considerable distance; and we moved on in a direction that led us between two of these lines. It soon appeared that they were tents, and beyond them inclosures, containing the cattle spread over a large space of ground.

A deep bay, or a long howl, had occasionally given us intimation that the huge dogs which guard every tent as well as the cattle inclosures, were on the alert, though not yet alarmed; but now one or two loud, sharp barks, followed by an universal yell from all quarters, told us that we were discovered by these trusty guards. This was the well-known, pre-concerted signal: "Forward! for-

* "Subah Kauzib," the *lying*, or false dawn, is a phenomenon common in these eastern countries; consisting in a brightness which appears from an hour to half an hour before the true dawn commences. It may be some optical deception, depending upon refraction of the sun's rays, even when he is considerably below the visible horizon.

ward!" shouted Omer Khan, who was now at our head; "Bismillah! Bismillah!"*

"Allah! Allah! Tekeh! Tekeh!" answered every man, and dashed forward at full speed towards the tents. Hardly was there time for the alarm given by the dogs to be taken by the still sleeping inhabitants, when our horsemen thundered in among them. The first of the men, as they rushed from their tents to see what was the matter, ran upon our lances or swords; and even those who came from a greater distance, unarmed and confounded, fell unresisting before their ruthless murderers!

Shrieks now rose on all sides:—men, women, and children, finding no safety in their tents, were seen rushing from them half naked, and attempting to fly;—the dogs, frightened at the uproar, barked and bit at every thing;—the cattle, partaking of their terror, broke down their slender inclosures, and scoured over the plain; and the tents, the slight fastenings of which were cut by the horsemen, or burst by the flying cattle, were overturned, and their contents scattered abroad. Fires now burst forth in some, which, blazing

* Bismillah! "In the name of God." An exclamation constantly in the mouth of all Mahometans, who pronounce it on all occasions, before commencing even the most common operations of life: it is prayer, invocation, and blessing.

abroad, threw a wild red gleam over the scene of tumult and carnage.

No opposition could be offered to us, for none of our enemies could find arms or horses, nor had they any rallying point to form upon. We had but to slaughter, and mercilessly did we that morning avenge our murdered friends: — men, women, and children fell indiscriminately in the grey dawn; for all passed so rapidly, that before the light was clear, the whole was nearly over.

But our task was not at an end. We had, it is true, destroyed the principal division of the camp, while our friends had been as successful with another of nearly equal size; but there were several smaller aouls in the neighbourhood, and it was soon discovered that the fugitives had gone to join one of these, the inhabitants of which, having taken the alarm, had armed themselves, and were now advancing to ascertain and oppose the force of their enemy.

Poor wretches! the effort was worse than useless. Not a man of our party had fallen; not a scratch was received by us in the first encounter, so that, intoxicated with carnage, and undiminished in numbers, we swept on like a whirlwind to meet them. But not a moment did they withstand the shock: their numbers were small; they had not two hundred men, indifferently armed and mounted; and when they saw us, reeking with

the slaughter of their friends, come thundering down upon them, they broke and fled: it then was too late; we overtook them in a moment, and many were at once borne down and trodden under foot. The remainder, however, seeing that nothing was to be gained by flight, took courage from despair, and boldly faced us. This was the first resistance we had met with, and I soon found all my skill called into action.

My friend and master, Selim Beg, was among the foremost of his party in pursuit: he had charged through the enemies' troop, and when they rallied he found himself in advance of his own men, and almost surrounded by five or six of the enemy. In the whole affair I had kept my eye upon him, pressing forward as close as possible to his side; and now we were together, opposed, as I have mentioned, to some of the stoutest champions of the enemy, rendered resolute by despair. At the first charge, Selim's spear entered deeply into the breast of his opponent's horse, which, rearing upright, caught the blow intended for its rider; unable to recover itself, it fell backwards upon him; but the spear was broken, and while thus disarmed, the lance of another, at full speed, had reached within a yard of Selim's body. I saw the coming danger, and believed him lost, but rushed with my drawn sword upon the fellow, while, almost mad with alarm, I uttered a loud

shout; he started at the noise, and swerved from his course—the spear but grazed the shoulder of Selim, though the shock almost overthrew his horse;—but my sword descended on the neck of the foe as he passed, and he rolled from his horse upon the ground. I gazed at his huge body for an instant, as he lay, and drew my long-held breath; but this ill-timed pause was nearly fatal. I was recalled to myself by a blow, which, parried by Selim's sword, whistled harmlessly past my head, and we were instantly and closely engaged with two others of the enemy, who came spurring to support their fellow comrades. Others of our people now joined us, just as Selim had succeeded in cleaving his opponent's head; while I, less fortunate, received a blow on the neck, which, though the wound it inflicted was slight, almost tumbled me from my horse; and I might have fared ill enough, had not my old friend Hamet, who, from the first rencounter had kept me in view, spurred up at the moment, and thrust his lance through the man who dealt it.

I saw nothing more for some time; but, indeed, the whole was over—the flower of the enemy's force had been destroyed, and the rest in flight fell an easy prey, or escaped by the fleetness of their horses and superior knowledge of the ground. Our men now halted, and stragglers from the pursuit came in to the loud shouting of their com-

rades. We returned to the scene of our first attack, while a small force was sent to the inferior camps to seize the women and children, and bring the most valuable of the moveables to the place of rendezvous.

To one, like me, unaccustomed to carnage, it was an appalling scene. In the intoxication of youthful spirits, maddened by the shouting and the din of arms, the atrocities that were committed by the uncertain light of early morning, had, in a great measure, escaped my notice;—in the eagerness of doing I hardly looked at what was done: but now, as we returned to the scene of horror, with spirits satiated with carnage, and saw the victims of our fury, cold, silent, stiffening in their blood, with what different feelings did I view it! Lifeless mothers were there, with their pale and mangled children, who, in their vain attempt at flight, had fallen under our unsparing swords. Miserable old women, with their grey hair clotted with blood, and young girls, lovely as the Houries of Paradise, their bosoms gashed with wounds, lay trampled on by the cattle, among burnt and overthrown tents, and all the melancholy wreck into which the demoniacal work of a few minutes had transformed a populous and well-ordered camp. When these terrible effects of our prowess flashed upon my inexperienced eyes, I became rooted to the spot: however unmoved the hardy and valiant

heroes of our band might be, I was overwhelmed with sadness and horror. It recalled to my memory most vividly and painfully a scene of my childhood, which had begun to fade from it like a dream of the night; the slaughter of my clan, and the death of my mother, were again before my eyes, and the visions of glory and promotion, after which I had panted so ardently, became for the time worthless and disgusting.

In this sad and bitter mood, while others spread about in search of plunder, I wandered through the ruined encampment, dwelling painfully on the dead and dying, as they lay scattered on every side; when, passing by a heap of rubbish, consisting, as it appeared, of broken reeds and half-burnt scraps of the black felts which cover the Toorkomans tents, my eye was caught by a slight movement in one part of it. I went up, and had scarcely touched it with my spear, when I was startled by a scream from beneath the heap. It was a poor little girl, who was endeavouring to conceal herself among the ruins until the search should be over. She screamed piteously, when I pulled her from her hiding-place, nor for some time could I bring her to do any thing but tremble and shriek out "Amaun! Amaun!* pity me unhappy!" I was in no humour to harm her, but, drawing her gently towards me, told her, that if

* "Mercy," or "quarter."

she would come along with me, no one should be permitted to molest her; for it soon occurred to me that if the little creature could be preserved, it would be just the present I had promised to Shireen. "But you must take my mother too!" cried the poor child with great earnestness; "you must take care of her too—here she is, sorely hurt, and she will not speak to me!" I followed the poor thing to the heap of rubbish among which lay her mother,—but she was already quite dead. When she comprehended that this was the case, her grief and dismay knew no bounds: she fell on the body shrieking with an anguish that made my heart sore, and soon rendered her almost insensible; of this state I took advantage to carry her in my arms back to the place of rendezvous.

When I made my appearance thus loaded, I was saluted from all quarters with loud jeers and laughter.

"Oh, ho!" said one, "here, Master Ismael has taken care of himself; he has taken an Eersanee wife, at least."

"Ah, young blood, young blood," said another, shaking his head, "this is the way with these young fellows; but he would have done more wisely if he had secured her ornaments, without the worthless carcase."

"Or, suppose he had caught hold of a few more camels and cattle," said a third.

"Is she not rather young for you, Ismael?" asked a fourth;—"but every one to his liking. Now, I prefer this jade of a mare, which will help me to carry my booty, to a worthless baggage, whom I should have to carry myself."

At this moment, Selim, coming up, looked with some surprise at my little burthen, and was also about to make some remark, when I stopped him by telling him what I had seen and done; adding, that I intended to carry the girl back with me for his sister Shireen.

"What are you dreaming of, man?" said he; "how can that young creature ever accompany you? we shall have enough to do with the valuable plunder we have got—we can't encumber ourselves with such things as that."

"She shall be no encumbrance, I swear to you," cried I earnestly; "I have no plunder, nor do I want any. All I want is to keep my promise to your sister, and she shall share my horse, and give trouble to no one; so do not, my dear Selim, oppose me in this: rather aid me with your voice against the clamour that I know will be raised."

"Foolish boy," cried Selim, "you do not know what you are undertaking: the child will never reach our camp, and you must, on her account, give up all your share of booty, which might be of so much use to you hereafter."

He was proceeding in his remonstrance, when

Omer Khan, whom I had not seen since the end of the fight, came up, attracted by the earnestness of our discourse.

"Barikillah! Ismael," cried he, "you have made a good job of your first campaign; why, you are a perfect Pehlewan,—a hero. Selim tells me you saved him an ugly blow, I shall not forget that;—but what the plague have you got there?" added he, observing the little girl, who, stunned and frightened at the bustle, clung round me, and hid her face in the skirts of my gown: "what young animal is this?—what do you mean to make of her, eh?"

I blushed, and hung my head, rather alarmed at the view he seemed likely to take of my project, when Selim, pitying my embarrassment, took up the discourse, told my story, and added, that my little captive was meant as a present for his daughter. "A present for Shireen!" echoed Omer Khan, knitting his brows and bending his keen eyes on me; "and what has Ismael to do with Shireen, that he should think of exposing himself, or plaguing us, to make her presents?" In a hesitating tone I now told the Khan of my promise to his daughter, but I did not think it necessary to relate *all* the particulars of our parting scene. He still looked suspiciously and with some displeasure at me; but Selim, taking my part, observed, "that there was nothing unnatural in my

wish to make a present of my first-fruits in war to one of my patron's family;" and added, "that I had promised my charge should give no trouble to any one on the retreat:—and, indeed," added he, "I do not think she will long plague even him, for the poor little creature seems so nearly dead already, that she will certainly be left in the sands ere half our first march is over."—"Well," exclaimed Omer Khan, after some pause, "the youth has behaved like a man to-day, he has won his right to favour, and shall have it; I wish he had been wiser, however—but let him have his fancy, only take care that it does not impede our retreat: and remember," added he sternly, "I will have no playing the fool in my family." With this hint he turned away, leaving Selim and me looking on each other with some confusion.

"My father," observed Selim, after a pause—"my father is ruffled, but he is fond of you, and you must not mind occasional asperities, which occur in the very best of tempers. It is only on some particular subjects that he is apt to become so much displeased; and of all these, whatever is connected with the management of his family, particularly the female part of it, is most apt to rouse his feelings and alarm his suspicions." He paused, but was about to resume his speech, when the clamour of parties arriving with prisoners and cattle,—female shrieks, with the curses of their

captors, and the loud shouting of the chiefs, who endeavoured to maintain some degree of order, broke off our discourse. We ran to our posts; and I, finding my friend Hamet already on duty, guarding some plunder that belonged to the chief, easily prevailed on him to take charge of my little captive, while I went to assist in preparing for our retreat.

This step could not indeed have been long delayed without imminent danger. We knew that several men of the plundered aouls had made good their escape; and though we had ascertained that there was not within a considerable distance any camp of sufficient force to afford the means of pursuing us with effect, it was still obviously prudent, with our tired horses, to lose no time in regaining our own territories, before any force that might be mustered could overtake us. Before the sun was three hours high, the work of plunder as well as that of death had been completed, and in two hours more that plunder was bound upon the cattle—chiefly horses and camels—which we determined to carry with us; the rest were slaughtered or maimed. Our prisoners, consisting of about two hundred women and girls, with only forty or fifty men, were pinioned and set upon the spare beasts, or mounted behind ourselves on the strongest of our horses; and the whole party, thus encumbered, quitted the scene of desolation, and turned

their faces homeward. The preceding sun had set on that unhappy camp and its dependent aouls, in plenty, comfort, and peace, crowded with full two thousand souls of every age and sex, rich in cattle and in goods—the next day it shone upon a heap of smoking ruins; but there was no one to weep over them, for the wolf, the jackal, and the vulture, were feasting in the blood of its warriors, and its few remaining daughters were led far away into slavery. Such is Toorkoman war and Toorkoman revenge!

CHAPTER IX.

THE RETREAT.

DETERMINED to keep my word, and to be independent of all assistance, I contrived a sort of cushion behind my saddle, upon which I seated my little prize, with her arms about me; and secured her from accident by a shawl passed round her body and mine. She continued for a long time to cry bitterly; till at length she fell into a sort of stupor, and became quiet. I encouraged her as well as I could, and by soothing expressions succeeded in inspiring her with rather more confidence; although she could not be brought to forget that she was in the hands of those whom she had been taught to dread from her earliest childhood, and who had on that day destroyed all her family. But the poor child soon became miserably tired; and I was glad, when, after a most fatiguing march, which lasted until about three hours after sunset, we halted at

some wells in a low spot, where a few half-dried herbs, along with some barley from the plundered camp, afforded a scanty refreshment to our horses and cattle. The exhausted state of these, as well as of the prisoners and ourselves, required a few hours' repose, even at the hazard of a surprise; and, indeed, so fatigued was every one with that day's work, that I believe the watch was but indifferently kept; but nothing disturbed our rest. I wrapped up my little charge with all the care I could, and took her to sleep in my arms.

Next morning, before the sun was up, the more prudent and active of our company summoned the rest; and starting from profound sleep, we proceeded to load and march. Anxious for the comfort of my poor captive, I gave up the idea of carrying her behind me all the way, and made interest with Hamet to procure her a place, for this day's march, on one of the lightest-loaded camels; where, nestled in among a pile of felt and carpet furniture, the little damsel sat more at her ease than on the croup of my horse. But I took care to keep out of my master's way as far as possible, for fear of awkward questions; even Selim made no observation on the subject: and although, from the dropping and disabling of animals, and the necessity of assisting valuable captives, who were unable to continue the march on foot, the

remaining cattle became still more heavily laden, I continued this whole day free of my burthen.

In this manner we proceeded, though not without alarm; for the rising of the dust on either hand gave us reason more than once to dread that our foes had overtaken us; and once, a small party of horsemen certainly came in view upon our flank, near enough to observe our strength, but no large body made their appearance, nor did we experience an attack of any sort; although, Heaven knows! we left traces enough, and dismal ones, in our course to guide pursuers.

As we approached our own territories, our chiefs, anxious for the preservation of the valuable booty and captives, instead of relaxing, urged on the march more rapidly than at first; and such is the excellence and high condition of the Toorkoman horses, that they bore this increased fatigue without distress, and even appeared to increase in spirits, as their instinct told them that the termination of their toil approached. The poor women and younger prisoners, indeed, felt it severely, and a good many, unable to endure it longer, were left to their fate. But it was well for us that the foresight of our chiefs had thus urged us forward. On the evening of the fourth day, when we knew that our own camp was almost in sight, some of the rearward horse-

men came spurring up to tell that a cloud of dust was seen rising behind us, which, from its extent, betokened a large body of horsemen. These tidings produced an immediate bustle in our host —the weary cattle were goaded forward, the bonds of the prisoners drawn tighter; as many as could free themselves of encumbrance got ready for action, and fell into the rear; but all pushed forward at the most rapid pace in their power, the strong and active pressing and pushing on the slow or obstinate. Woe be to him or her among the prisoners who failed or fell, for they were mercilessly murdered, both to terrify the rest into exertion, and that they might neither escape, nor inform those in pursuit of our real condition. Not a word was spoken, nor a sound heard but the quick trampling of the horses' feet, and the loudly-uttered threats or abuse of those who urged on the prisoners, or their faint cry for mercy as the butt-end of a lance was applied to quicken their motions. Many an eye was turned anxiously to the rear, as the huge column of dust rose yet higher and denser with the wind, and proved too surely that our pursuers gained upon us fast.

At last, as the wind veered to one side, those farthest in the rear could mark the gleam of a spear, or of a steel-cap, breaking through the cloud; and soon the dark forms of those who

bore them might be distinguished; but at this time, too, a cry of joy from the advance of our column, which had just crowned a low ridge of sand-hillocks, communicated the glad tidings, that the first encampments of our tribe were in view. A few of the foremost horsemen instantly darted onward to give notice of our approach, and beat up for assistance to repel the advancing foe.

By this time our enemies were within less than a mile: they had learned from some of the disabled people, left behind in our retreat, that we could not be far before them, and had in consequence urged their horses to the utmost of their strength to overtake us before we should be able to arrive within reach of aid, so that, though now within our view, they were forced to advance at a more moderate pace, in order to give the rear time to close up. The shout in our column told them that they were late; nevertheless they closed with us, and poured a flight of arrows upon our rear-guard, which, in good order, and inspirited by the nearness of succour, returned the salute as they retreated; and this desultory skirmishing continued for a mile or two, without much effect on either side.

And now fresh and more continued shouts from the advance of our party, as they rode across the last sandy ridge near our own sweet river, announced some new event; and soon the joyful

tidings spread, that a considerable troop of horsemen were advancing from the nearest tents. Upon this, our heroes, certain now of victory, where but a moment before even safety was doubtful, first halted to form a little, and then with loud shouts rushed forward to charge the enemy, who were by no means prepared for such an assault. They received us, however, boldly, and for a few minutes there was a fierce and close-handed struggle with the spear and the sword; but the news which had given spirits to us, spread also to the enemy, carrying with it the chill of disappointment. They did not wait for the appearance of their fresh opponents, but hastily retreated upon their still advancing rear; the whole thus fell into confusion, which our men would readily have taken advantage of, but their horses were almost worn out, and the night was fast coming on; so, after a last charge, in which several of the enemy were cut to pieces, we turned and rejoined the line of march, leaving the fresh troops to pursue our victory if they thought fit.

These, however, consisted only of about one hundred and fifty men and boys, mounted, on the spur of the moment, to assist a detachment from our camp, which had been sent to seek intelligence of us; and they were too weak to risk any thing alone against the enemy; so, leaving them to retreat as they best might, we all made our way to the

first large aoul, where we remained for the night, vigilantly watching against any assault on the part of our defeated pursuers. But from them we were quite secure; the scouts sent out for intelligence reported, on their return, that they had certainly retreated homeward: from some of the wounded, they learned that the force had originally consisted of about four hundred and fifty men, rapidly got together from the neighbouring camps, to endeavour, if possible, to overtake us encumbered with our plunder. Of these, more than sixty had been disabled or killed in our skirmish and charge, or had fallen behind on the route; so that they were now too weak to attempt any thing of importance where the alarm had been so effectually given, and they had consequently sought the speediest road back to the neighbourhood of Andkooee, and the banks of the River Amoo.*

The next day we arrived happily at our delightful home by the Chushmah Jemallee, and were welcomed by those we had left there, with a joy at our safety which was not the less lively for the rich plunder we had succeeded in bringing home. I may well say our safety, for out of the whole number that left the camp, we did not lose above ten or a dozen men, and most of these were killed in the skirmish within sight of our homes. It was calculated, that of our enemies not

* The Oxus.

less than a thousand souls, men, women, and children, were killed or taken prisoners. Their loss in cattle could not be estimated; but we succeeded in bringing into camp about three hundred horses, and an equal number of camels, besides yaboos, and inferior animals. Such was the result of a well-concerted enterprize, aided by good fortune, and conducted with courage and skill.

When the Khan and his immediate attendants reached the tents, the whole of his family rushed out to receive him, and my sweet Shireen advanced timidly among the rest of the women: her eyes, which wandered over the party, soon rested on me; and I beheld her beautiful countenance illuminated by a flush of joy, which was mingled with surprise as she observed the burthen which I had now resumed, seated on my horse's croup, and clinging to me with renewed alarm. When Shireen came in turn to salute her father, he took her kindly in his arms, and after embracing her, was about to pass on; when, recollecting himself, he exclaimed, "By the head of the Prophet, I had forgot! Where is that vagabond of a Kuzzilbash, that played the fool about bringing a present for this girl? let him come forward now." I made my appearance in much confusion; for this was not the time nor the manner in which I meant to have offered the gift, for which I had braved so much. But the Khan was

not to be denied: perhaps he suspected my hope of a tender interview, which he did not choose his daughter should be exposed to; and resolved to crush this, with all other foolish and aspiring hopes, in the very bud. At his desire, I unfastened my little charge, who was still buckled to my back, and set her on the ground before him. The poor thing, half dead from fatigue, was almost annihilated by the half-stern, half-jocular manner of my master, who, taking hold of her not in the gentlest way, cried, "Why, what sort of a baggage is this? It is a perfect child; she 'll never grow to be a woman! And what is she in such a fright about? does she think we are gouls, going to eat her up? Here, Shireen, here is a young fool, who has risked his neck and half killed his horse and himself, on purpose to bring you a young Eersanee whelp as an offering*—as a nuzzer from my servant to his master's daughter,—do you mind? and as such I permit you to accept of it! but I need not add, there must be no more such fooleries—you will not find me a man to be trifled with!" So saying, he retired into his tent with his family, leaving me astounded

* The Persians use different terms to express the various descriptions of gifts or offerings. Thus, *Enam* signifies the present of a superior to an inferior; *Peishcush*, or *Nuzzer*, that of an inferior to a superior; *Moojdeh*, a present for bringing good news, &c.

at the tone he had assumed, as well as at the obscure hints conveyed by his warnings, and not a little mortified at the untoward circumstances under which my unfortunate offering had been presented to my mistress. The only consolation I had, was in observing the kindness with which Shireen received the little captive, and the glance which told me that my attention was not lost upon its object. Fatigued and dispirited, I applied myself, with the rest of my comrades, to tend our wearied horses, and dispose of the plunder; nor, till all this was completely arranged, did we betake ourselves to repose.

CHAPTER X.

MORTIFICATION.

NEXT morning, rising early, I repaired to the Chushmah Jemallee, the usual rendezvous of the women, in hopes of obtaining an interview with Shireen. She did not appear, and I was vexed and disappointed;—I thought her unkind, changed;—and after lingering for some time, I gave up hopes of seeing her, and wandered from place to place, performing my usual duties with restless ill-humour.

In the course of my work I was found by Selim, who, still elated with the success of our expedition, and the applause as well as plunder he had gained, accosted me gaily. His high spirits jarred upon my soul like an ill-tuned instrument; my replies were cold and abrupt, and so ill accorded with the state of his own feelings that he paused and looked at me with surprise.

"What is the matter, my friend?" at last said

he; "what causes this depression when joy reigns over the whole camp, and you yourself share so largely and so deservedly in the praises that are bestowed upon all?—say, what ails you, Ismael?"

"Joy," replied I gloomily—"joy is for the happy and the free;—praise—I lay claim to none for doing my duty;—but the Kuzzilbash slave might have been spared taunts and mockery, for periling his life, and sacrificing all his chance of private booty, to carry home a suitable present for his master's daughter!" The emphasis I laid on these words brought to Selim's recollection the scene that had occurred on our return the day before, between his father, sister, and me. "Ah," cried he, "I thought as much; you are distressed at my father's seeming harshness, and disappointed at the manner in which he has taken your kindly-meant exertions. But you must remember, my friend, that my father is advanced in years, and still older in the trade of war: he consequently makes little allowance for the feelings or fancies of youth, and sees merit only in the bold execution of duty—in the performance of gallant and daring exploits. Your romantic promise to Shireen was a thing he could neither understand nor appreciate the motives of; and I can assure you, that had your behaviour on the whole of our chappow not been greatly to his mind, you would not have met with so much indulgence. But, on the other hand,

your patience of fatigue and privation, your indefatigable attention to all points of duty, and your spirited conduct in action, were things which he fully estimates, and which have given him the most favourable impressions regarding you; it only remains for you to support the credit you have acquired, and to take special care not to lessen or defeat the good effects it may produce upon your fortune, by any inconsiderate rashness of your own. As to your slavery, as you call it, I think you cannot but allow that it has fallen more lightly on you than on most of those in your condition; and you know that the fault is principally your own, if you are not now in a situation to work out your own freedom."

I was silent;—there was so much truth in what Selim had said, yet it had something so grating to my feelings, that for the world I could not have forced myself to reply, but remained dark and moody, turning my eyes fixedly on the ground. I hardly admitted to myself all that was passing in my mind, where shame, vexation, and disappointment were mingled in unspeakable bitterness. But my friend read that heart better than I dared to do. Considering me for a while without speaking, "Come, come," at last cried he, "clear up your brow, and accompany me to the exercising ground; let not others see you in this mood; I would not for the whole booty we took, that you

appeared thus in such a season of rejoicing;—you —one of those best entitled to enjoy it—with so long a face and so gloomy an eye? what could people think? what would they say?—By the way," observed he in continuation, "I once before took notice to you of my father's peculiarities, and of those in particular which regard the females of his family. We Toorkomans, you know, have few of those scruples regarding women which are entertained by the Kuzzilbashes and Osmanlees. The mysterious veil, and the sacred screen of the harem, are little known among us;—our women move about in open day, freely and unrestrainedly as the men; nay, our enemies aver, that many of us little care about their virtue or their chastity. Yet this is a base slander; for I am certain, that in the families of the elders and well reputed persons of our tribes, the women are as pure, and the men as jealous of their honour, as the strictest among those nations whose women are constantly immured.

"Among these, I may safely say, that my father is one of the most scrupulous; and woe be to the man who should wrong him in this point! Another matter, on which he is equally punctilious, is the sacredness of his oath or his promise. There is, as every one knows, a certain degree of deceit, which custom sanctions, and the

way of the world requires;* and though we Toorkomans do not carry our laxity in this particular so far as our neighbours the Kuzzilbashes, there are none of us, perhaps, who have not occasionally recourse to subterfuges, evasions, or untruths. But when my father has once voluntarily given a solemn promise, or has been induced to bind himself to the performance of any condition by an oath, nothing may ever compel him to violate it.

"My sister Shireen, his eldest daughter, has been long the subject of such a solemn promise. Certain events induced him several years ago to promise her in marriage to the eldest son of Hyder Beg, his relation; and the marriage would ere this have been solemnized, had not the young man, who chanced to form an intimacy with the son of an Oozbeck nobleman, solicited and obtained permission to accompany his friend on a pilgrimage to Mecca, whither the father was bound by a vow: they have now been three years absent, and their return, which is only supposed to have been delayed by the dangerous and unsettled state of the countries they have to travel through, is now daily looked for. It is possible that this circumstance, and uneasiness at seeing his favourite scheme remaining so long unaccomplished, may

* This is, at least, Persian reasoning and Persian morality.

have in some degree aggravated his impatience on first hearing of your intended present to his daughter, although I cannot say that I think him very reasonable in the affair. As it has occurred, however, and as it may be somehow or other connected with the circumstances I have just related, I thought it was the part of a friend to advise you of them." Selim gave a particular emphasis to the last observation, and, as he concluded, bent a glance on me so keen that I could not bear its expression, and was fain to stoop towards the ground, in order to hide the confusion which overpowered me, and which rushed over all my face in a scarlet tide. The glance was soon withdrawn, and succeeded by a look of deep compassion, which was barely observed by me, as, in pity to my evident distress, he quitted me, and turned to join his companions at their exercises.

I had need to be alone to reflect; there was matter sufficient to engage all my thoughts. Shireen betrothed!—about to be married! My beloved companion, the object I held dearest on earth—till now I did not know how dear—about to be taken from me! I never had examined the sentiment I entertained for Shireen, it had not once entered my head to do so; I only knew that it was sweet, and I cherished it without considering consequences. I now saw how much bitterness I had been preparing for myself. It seemed

as if the very consummation of my misery was at hand, and that I was never to behold my beloved Shireen again. The detested bridegroom—for hateful and detested I felt he must be—might arrive in a month, a week, a day; and then, doubtless, Omer Khan would bring to a conclusion the marriage he had so much at heart. There was no help for it. What was I? A slave! a Kuzzilbash! a Sheah! I felt as if I could almost have renounced my faith, if the sacrifice would have preserved Shireen unmarried.—Unmarried! Would that content me? Oh no! I felt that her daily, her hourly presence was necessary to me; that to satisfy my longings she must be wholly mine;—it was love—powerful love!—that love which I had heard described in the poems recited by our story-tellers and bards, that filled my heart and absorbed all my senses. And how was it now to be satisfied? Reason, asserting her sway at intervals, in spite of the confusion that reigned in my brain, lifted her voice and told me, that Shireen, the daughter of a Tekeh chief, could never be the wife of a Kuzzilbash slave. Despondency seized on me, and I wandered about in utter hopeless misery.

At length, overcome with exhaustion of mind, I had thrown myself down in a retired part of the ruined garden which lay behind the Chushmah Jemallee, and was gazing on the ground with vacant eyes, when my attention was excited by a

slight noise in the rank grass, and on looking up, I observed a female figure slowly approaching the spot where I lay:—it was Shireen, and alone. When she observed me she started, and half-turned as if to retreat; but the misery expressed in my countenance fixed her to the spot, for I could not speak: she hesitated, gazed, and returned. "Ah, Ismael!" said she, while the tears stood in her eyes, "I must speak to you in spite of every thing. You are unhappy—you are ill—what is the matter? I dare not stay a moment to comfort you; but can I do nothing, can I send no one to you?—my brother Selim? tell me."—"Is it you, Shireen," cried I, "that ask if I am unhappy, and desire to know the cause? Are these the terms on which we parted, or those on which I hoped we should have met again? No, you know too well there is a change, a dismal change, which has blighted all my visions of happiness, and doomed me for ever to be wretched!"—"Alas, alas!" replied she, "there is indeed a change, but not in me, dear Ismael; not in me, believe me. I am the same I ever was to you; and never, never can be otherwise:—but oh! you do not know—I dare not tell you—I must not, indeed I must not stay here any longer; only do not be so very miserable, do not look so darkly—indeed I love you, and I thank you for all your kindness.—Oh that I dared to speak!—but I must go, I must

indeed, or——" "Or what, Shireen? Are you afraid of me, or what is it that you dread? do you grudge me a few moments, when they may be among the last we can have together? How soon may it be out of your power to see me at all!"—"What mean you?" cried she breathlessly: "do you indeed know?"—"I know all, Shireen: I know that you are betrothed—to be married—married and taken from me—from me who cannot live without you!"—And the misery of this thought, exasperated by her presence at the moment, gave me such anguish, that I hid my face in my hands, and burst into a passionate fit of tears. "Oh, for mercy's sake! for Allah's sake!" cried the poor girl, terrified at this sight, "be not agitated thus—recover your senses, or I shall be distracted myself, for I cannot endure to see your grief! Am I less miserable than you, Ismael? — it was but last night that all this was told me; and what a night I passed! Worn out with weeping, I fell asleep, and dreamed such dreadful dreams, and woke only to find it all true —my eyes are sore with weeping, and it was but now that I sought the cool air to refresh me a little. But do you know," continued she, anxiously looking around, and dropping her voice, as if afraid of being overheard—"do you know, that I am forbid to walk or play with you any more, or even to speak to you."—"How!" exclaimed I,

starting up in a fury of rage, "what mean you? who has done this? Selim told me that you were betrothed, but he never told me this!—is he too false?"—"No, no," interrupted she; "do be composed, or I must leave you at once. Selim is your true friend, and interposed, as far as he could, when my father, in his severest tone, denounced his anger against me, if I should ever resume the intimate terms on which I have been with you, and which, it seems, he had never suspected, or at least never attended to. Ah! he spoke so angrily, and called you by such harsh names!—but he loves you, Ismael, for all this; he said you were a brave fellow or you should not remain another day in his family—that he would sell you to the Oozbecks of Kyvah."—"Sell me! sell me!" breathlessly repeated I; "did the tyrant dare?—but, merciful Allah! what am I, that talk thus!—am I not his slave? may he not sell, kill, or cut me piecemeal at his pleasure?"—"No, no, he will not sell you nor harm you," cried Shireen, in an earnest, soothing tone; "only moderate this violence, which will kill me, and can do you no good;—it is by soothing, not by irritating, you must endeavour to restore matters to a better footing. My father is now angry; he dreads or suspects more than he has reason for; but this will subside by degrees, and you will find him return to his former habits of kindness, if you will be but prudent and cautious,

But let us not be seen together, dear Ismael; you may depend upon the affection of Shireen, whatever becomes of her: but farewell now, may God protect you!"—"No, no," cried I, "stay a moment; meet me at the retired chasm behind yon sand-hills, where the rocks are, and where the wild asses sometimes feed; meet me to-morrow, after the morning work is over."—"I cannot, I cannot!"—"Then I will not leave you now;—if you wish me to retain my senses, and act with coolness and judgment, do not refuse me;—promise!"—"Oh!" cried she, wringing her hands, "what shall I do!—what will become of me! Oh, Ismael, you are cruel to treat me thus! Well, I will try to come; I will, indeed, do my best; once more, may God protect you!" She was gone, and darkness seemed to cover me. I rose, scarcely sensible of what I did, yet, in a degree, less miserable than before, and took my way towards the tents.

During the whole of this day I saw no more of the Khan or of Selim. I avoided observation, and retired at night to meditate rather than to sleep,—if the tumultuous thoughts that swept in wild succession through my mind could be called meditation. It was a chaos in which one object alone was distinct, and that object was Shireen. The Khan's anger, and the degradation which I had suffered—the interdict passed on my communications with his daughter—the intended mar-

riage of that daughter—all mingled in a dark and boding cloud of misfortune, that threatened to change the hue of my hitherto happy life to gloominess and woe;—all my restless musings ended in the bitter conclusion that Shireen was for ever lost to me. I had, it was true, made an appointment with her for the morrow;—yet to what end? what had I to propose? what could I tell her, but that which had so often been already said? She could do nothing against the will of her father, nor could I by any means shake off the power and authority of my master—to what use, then, was the proposed interview?—But it was too late to reason; passion demanded the meeting, and to go I was determined, come of it what might.

This war of thoughts settled into something of a calm before morning, and on rising I applied myself sedulously to my usual occupations, determined to assume an appearance of the tranquillity I did not feel, and try the effect of an unconcerned exterior and attention to my duty, upon the temper of my master. I was at my post, along with Selim and others of my master's household; and in the usual exercises of horsemanship, the spear and the bow, I performed so successfully as to attract the praise of Omer Khan. "Well done," said he, "Ismael;—Mash Allah! * the boy

* A common exclamation of praise, as "Bravo! well done!"

will do yet:—I feared that all thy manhood had been expended in our last chappow, but I see there is still some left—there is good hope of thee." This was not lost upon me; I determined to profit by the lesson, and let slip no opportunity of gaining the Khan's good opinion: hope, which never dies, revived within my breast, and my spirits rose with the buoyancy of youth; although, had the question "Why?" been put to me, I should have been puzzled to answer it.

After the morning exercises and meal, during the time which at this season is usually given to repose, I stole out to the place of rendezvous. It was rather more than two miles distant from our tents, and quite beyond the strip of verdure produced by the river. Rising gradually from its banks, the country became sandy and bare, till, after crossing a low ridge of sand-hills, the eye looked down into a narrow dark ravine, the rocky sides of which, without a blade of grass, or bush, served to support the light moveable soil above them. It was like the bed of an ancient torrent; but water had never been seen there, and it was the resort only of jackals, wolves, and occasionally of the gourkhur, or wild ass, in chase of which alone did this wild spot ever receive visitors.

Hither I came, my limbs trembling with impatience, and eagerly examined its recesses, to discover if it were possible that my mistress could have anticipated me. But the solitude was com-

plete; no living thing was there, and I impatiently paced up and down the narrow valley, ever and anon climbing the bank to see if she approached.

Long did I continue thus, in a fever of anxiety and expectation, and my mind was busy in framing causes to account for the detention of my beloved. An ardent and excited imagination easily raises phantoms to terrify and distress its owner, nor was mine slow at this exercise. I pictured Shireen caught in the act of attempting to seek the forbidden interview. I saw her father's rage, and cursed my wilful folly for having exposed her to its fury. I made many wise resolutions of forbearance and prudence, swearing never more to expose her to peril, or myself to the risk of losing all chance of the Khan's favour, and consequently of communication with his daughter, by my wayward impatience. Then I asked myself, could Shireen have wantonly and cruelly deceived me? could she have voluntarily disappointed me? But both my heart and my reason gave indignant denial to the mental question, and I drove it from my soul as treason against the truth and sweetness of her nature.

But hours stole on, and she came not; it was time to resume my duties at the camp, and I came reluctantly to the resolution of returning and taking the chance of meeting her by the way.

I had scarcely reached the top of the sand-hill,

when I saw the figure of a woman hurrying fast towards the glen, and soon recognized her whom I had so impatiently expected. I flew to meet her, and she sank exhausted in my arms. "What is the matter, dear Shireen? why this agitation, this terror?"—"Ah! Ismael, you know not what I have risked in order to keep my promise. I am watched, and so, I fear, are you. We must separate immediately, if you wish to preserve the chance of ever seeing or speaking to me again. It is but a few minutes ago that I found an opportunity of stealing out unnoticed, and I have run all the way, because I knew you must be wearied with waiting for me, and dreaded lest you should think harshly of me. But now we have no time for words. I must return home at once."

"But stop, Shireen, tell me what has passed today?"—"Oh! you are getting into high favour again: my father could not help remarking what a brave active lad you were, and again regretted than you were a Kuzzilbash and a Sheah. You must try to keep him in good humour, and lull his suspicions to rest by caution, and then, perhaps, in time we may be more together again, and be happy. But, ah! how can that be? the time approaches, it must now indeed be close at hand when——But we must not think of that; for there is no help! we must submit to fate!"

"That is the deadly pang, Shireen; that is my

misery:—this hateful marriage—is there no way to prevent it? Allah, Allah! grant me but Shireen, and let my fortune be ever so dark, I will embrace it with delight!"—"Oh, Ismael," cried she, "would that I were a captive like thee, and then I might be happy; then no one would seek to part us." I clasped her to my breast, and we wept together, but neither of us could suggest the slightest remedy. Her alarm at the chance of being discovered now became excessive, and we began to walk towards the camp. She besought me to quit her, but my passion was too wild to be reasonable; nor was it until I saw Shireen almost sinking at my feet that I came to my senses. We then agreed to keep the most cautious reserve upon our words and actions in the presence of the family, and neither to speak nor meet in secret for some time. Shireen swore, that, come what would, she never would love any other than me, and that every means in her power should be used to delay, or, if possible, finally to break off her intended marriage, when the bridegroom should arrive; and we fervently prayed that this might be prevented by his speedy admission to the joys of Paradise. I then embraced and left Shireen to direct her course straight to the tents, while I reached them by a circuit that carried me round from an opposite quarter.

CHAPTER XI.

A COMMUNICATION.

For a long while after this I adhered to my resolution of busying myself in the usual occupations and warlike exercises of our youth, and in ingratiating myself with the Khan; nor had I any reason to be dissatisfied with my success. I carefully avoided all intercourse with Shireen, except now and then a stolen look of fondness, or secret act of attention. "Who," saith the poet, "shall control the affectionate intercourse of hearts that glow for each other? The lover sees his mistress in the beauty of the full moon: he looks upon the rose and cries, 'Behold there the sweetness of my beloved!'"

The season of our periodical emigrations in search of pasturage, which at this time came on, aided me greatly in keeping firm to my resolution, by diminishing the temptations which at other times seduced us into danger, while the continued bustle of marching afforded less opportunity to

others of making dangerous remarks upon the conduct of Shireen and myself: thus, in the course of time, the suspicions that had been excited, were gradually lulled. Omer Khan, indeed, appeared to have forgotten that he had even entertained any, and resumed his wonted frank and kindly manner with me; while the restraint which had been placed upon my intercourse with Shireen was gradually relaxed,—perhaps in consequence of no effort being made on our parts to resume it; and had not severe experience kept us in some degree upon our guard, we might have forgotten that any such restraint had ever existed.

Meantime, our revived feud with the Eersanees kept us constantly upon the alert. Eager to revenge our successful expedition against their camps, several attempts at surprises were made by them; but though some blood was shed, and some cattle were plundered on both sides, no decided advantage was gained; and the chief effect produced was the preventing either tribe from undertaking expeditions as usual against the Kuzzilbashes, or the Koords of Persian Khorasan.

In the course of time, however, both parties, wearied of this useless drain of strength and loss of time, as if by mutual consent, by degrees willingly desisted from hostilities, and turned their

attention to more profitable enterprizes. The northern part of Persian Khorasan was at this time in a state of great confusion: divided among a multitude of petty chiefs, each at the head of a tribe, and possessing several strongholds and castles, with more or less territory attached to them, there was a constant struggle for superiority, attended with unceasing frays and bloodshed. These chiefs, when unable to resist a powerful opponent, would frequently call in the aid of the tribes of the Desert, who thereby reaped a rich harvest; for, independent of the stipulated price of their assistance, they never returned to their homes without ravaging some defenceless district on their way, and carrying the inhabitants of such villages as they could seize, along with them into captivity.

Among these border chiefs, Nader Koolee Beg at this time held a conspicuous place. He was an Affshar, of no high rank, born in a village of Dereguz, and had raised himself by a fearless intrepidity, united to a sound judgment, to be one of the most redoubted leaders of this turbulent province. Many and very contradictory accounts were given of his early career; and there can be little doubt, that, born as he was in a country at all times harassed by feuds and invasions, and at a period when the whole of Persia had fallen into political and moral confusion,

the young Nader Koolee followed the fashion of the time, and took advantage of the opportunities afforded him by Providence, as well as of the powers of his own mind, to ameliorate his condition, and to raise his fortune to the level of his lofty and ambitious desires. It is very probable, that in the course of this career he may have committed acts which cannot be justified, if brought to the test of strict morality; but who was there, among all his countrymen, guiltless of such deeds? who was there, among the chiefs and nobles of that day, not only in Khorasan, but in all Persia, who had not, in self-defence, been forced to shed the blood of his kindred? These were the days when the hand of the father was against the son, and that of the nephew against the uncle; when brothers were open or secret foes; when the cup of the mother was not safe from the poisonous drugs of the daughter; and when even the husband dared not to trust the wife of his bosom;—how was it possible, in such times, to distinguish the crimes which had their source in ambition, from those that were perpetrated in self-defence?

Nader Koolee Beg, during his stormy youth, had often distinguished himself, among the chiefs of his tribe, against the Oozbecks and Toorkomans, who continually invaded the Persian territories: he was sometimes in open hostility, at others in

amicable union with the Koordish States upon the border; and having succeeded in reducing the most formidable of his neighbours, and establishing a very considerable influence, as well as power, throughout this quarter of the province, he was exerting himself to recover the city of Mushed, its capital, from the power of the rebellious usurper, Malik Mahmood Seistanee.

It happened, that Seyed Sultaun, a chief who resided at the old city of Diroom, on the borders of the Desert, and who held in subjection a considerable territory in its neighbourhood, conceiving himself injured by Nader Koolee Beg, and not being sufficiently powerful to attack him to advantage singly, invited several of the Toorkoman tribes to his assistance; and, among others, overtures were made to several chiefs of the Tekehs, of whom Omer Khan was one. Our enemies, the Eersanees, having their attention fully engaged in another quarter, and being ourselves unoccupied with any enterprize, these proposals were readily listened to, and nothing was now talked of but the riches and plunder we were to obtain in Koordistan. Even the holy city of Mushed itself, with the rich booty it would certainly afford, formed a tempting perspective in the view of those who were most sanguine.

Enthusiastically fond as I was of adventure, and eager to join in any enterprize that promised

to afford me an opportunity of distinguishing myself, I yet felt, in spite of my plundering Toorkoman education, strong scruples, both of heart and conscience, at being led thus confessedly against the land of my birth and the sacred city of my faith. I was myself an Affshar,—I could not forget it; and thus to be made instrumental to the fall of a chief of my own tribe, whom fame spoke highly of, and that in the very place where my father and clan once dwelt in honour and renown, —perhaps to trample on the dust to which their unburied bones were now reduced—there was in all this something so revolting, so like parricide, that I would willingly have sacrificed all my hopes of profit or advancement, to have been excused from joining the expedition. But this was impossible,—such scruples would have excited worse than laughter: I saw that my character for courage might suffer; that any backwardness on my part might be imputed to fear of peril in the undertaking, and this I could not endure: besides, I should have infallibly been ruined in the Khan's favour, which at present I had the most cogent reasons to seek and secure. Thus I silenced my scruples in the best way I could, and looked upon an expedition into Khorasan, on the terms above explained, with somewhat diminished reluctance.

A catastrophe, however, occurred at this time, which changed the whole complexion of my des-

tiny, and threw me into a career incalculably different from all that my imagination could have pictured from the occurrences of my past life. In order to explain this I must go back a little.

The cessation of intimacy between Shireen and myself was maintained only long enough to lull suspicion to rest, as we hoped, so that we might enjoy a greater degree of freedom in future. The intended bridegroom did not appear: the Khan, by nature of an unsuspicious temper, probably forgot for the time all the circumstances which had roused his jealousy of me, and, as I have before mentioned, resumed his former favour and kindness. The restraint placed at first upon Shireen appeared to be withdrawn, and by degrees we returned to our old habits of intimacy and affection. But bitter experience had taught us greater habitual caution; in public, therefore, we carefully avoided all appearance of entertaining any marked interest in each other; but in proportion as we felt this constraint, the indulgence of our feelings, when safe from intrusion, was more delightful and more eagerly enjoyed. We often met in places and at times remote from every eye, and many a stolen interview took place in the rocky dell already spoken of, the scene of our earliest and most interesting explanation.

The result of all this might easily have been foreseen by persons of more experience, although

it was not anticipated by us:—totally inconsiderate, heedless, and indeed ignorant of consequences—listening only to the dictates of a powerful passion, inflamed by frequent opportunities of indulgence—Shireen and I had completed our imprudence almost before we were aware that we had exceeded the earnest expression of our mutual tenderness.

This stolen intercourse had continued for some time, without our attention being awakened to aught beyond the delight which it yielded us,—when at length I began to be alarmed by an alteration in the health of my beloved Shireen. She lost her spirits, became silent and absent; her face grew thin and wan, and her person lost its delightful plumpness. At times she would shrink from my caresses, and again hiding her face in my bosom, would weep with uncontrollable bitterness. Still she would deny that any thing was the matter:—she was well, she assured me—quite well—her illness existed only in my fancy. But the change became daily more perceptible, and I could no longer endure the pain it gave me. "Shireen!" I exclaimed one day, "what can all this mean? do you love me no longer? why do you thus shrink from my tenderness? why do I no longer share your confidence?"

"Oh, Ismael!" replied the weeping girl; "I am changed indeed—but not in love to you: I do

not shun your caresses—alas! it is too late for that!"—"Too late! what can you mean, Shireen? you are ill! Merciful Allah! you are dying! is it not so?—Shireen! speak to me for Heaven's sake!"—She threw her arms around me, and faintly whispered, "Ismael, I shall be a mother! —if indeed," continued she with solemnity, "I am permitted to live until the birth of your child! —and what then will become of you? what will become of the wretched Shireen?" With what fervour did I strain her to my breast! Shireen a mother! the mother of my child!—her confession only filled me with inconsiderate joy. What youth of eighteen, indeed, would not be filled with pride when first told he is to be a father? But the death-like countenance of the unhappy girl, and a single moment's reflection, soon altered the current of my thoughts, and checked my exultation.

I saw that the situation of both was dangerous in the extreme, and that Shireen had but too much cause for her dejection and alarm. What, indeed, had she to expect but a disgraceful end?—and her timid affectionate nature shrunk with more affright from the thoughts of her father's fury, and the estranged, contemptuous glances of her family, than even from the prospect of approaching death. "If they would but save my child," cried she, wringing her hands in bitter

agony,—"if they would only preserve its dear life, and let me die quietly, I would be content, and bless them! But the furious rage and malicious cruelty which I know will be wrecked upon me, I fear I never can endure;—and indeed, I think I shall not live to see much of it, for I feel as if death were already near at hand, and I should rejoice at it if it were not the thought of you, dear Ismael, and the distress that you would feel at the fate of your poor Shireen! Ismael! you would not forget me!—yet why, why should you remember what would only give you anguish?—But, alas! what may become of you! Oh! what will they do to you when all shall be discovered? for I know, I am sure, suspicion will rest upon you, and you will be sacrificed to their bloody revenge. But this must not be—I cannot bear the thoughts—you must fly, Ismael! dearest Ismael, you must fly, and that without delay."

"Shireen, Shireen!" cried I, wild with anguish, "how can you talk thus? How can you think of a wretch like me, when your own situation is so much more alarming? I can brave their worst rage—I fear them not; but you, poor helpless girl!—merciful Allah! what will become of you?—what can be done? Wretch that I am, I have destroyed her who is dearer to me than a thousand lives!"—Oh! how bitterly now did I lament the blind inconsiderate rashness that had brought

us both into so dreadful a predicament; and still more deeply did I curse my wretched fortune, which had placed me in a condition where all the better impulses of my nature, all the aspirations of hope, all the overflowings of affection and love, were felt only to be blasted! I groaned in the utter helplessness of my misery, till Shireen forgot her own distress in the greater agony of mine, and exerted herself to restore me to composure.

But sorrow, however deep, repentance, however sincere, now came too late; the evil was done, and a remedy was to be found: still, nothing, that afforded the least hope of success, presented itself to our confused minds. We had no friends in whom we dared to confide. I at one time thought of communicating every thing to Selim, and trusting to his friendship for pardon and assistance; but the experiment was too hazardous:—even if I could have endured to throw myself upon his generosity, and expose him to the displeasure of his father, was it probable, that in a matter which implicated the honour of his family, his friendship for a slave would be regarded? was it not, indeed, too likely, that indignation at his friend's apparent falsehood and misconduct would tend to exasperate him, and render him a bitter enemy? We talked of flight—alas, whither could we fly! how could we ever hope to make our way through the

vast deserts by which we were encompassed, ignorant as we both were of pathway or course, and surrounded by camps of our own and other tribes —whether friend or foe, was of little consequence to us; and the fatigue such an undertaking would involve, in Shireen's situation—it was not to be thought of: our invention was exhausted, and we were forced to separate without a single practicable project being suggested by either. But though our situation was as dangerous as could well be imagined, it was still possible that the condition of Shireen might be concealed for a time, and better hopes might arise ere discovery took place. At all events, after our first burst of distress was past, we felt our hearts somewhat relieved by the communication that had taken place, and our spirits, with the elasticity of yet unbroken youth, rose as the danger appeared to recede; the necessity, however, of providing for the future was sufficiently apparent, and I quitted Shireen to ruminate on the subject, and devise, if I could, some plan of operations.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DISCOVERY.

CHANCE, or fate, by whatever name it may be called, led my steps to the rocky dell, already often mentioned as the scene of many tender interviews with my beloved Shireen. It was not to be wondered at, that, occupied as my thoughts now were with reflections on our mutual situation, I should seek it mechanically.

While winding down the narrow path that led to its recesses, I was surprised by observing at a little distance, seated on some fragments of stone, and utterly motionless, a human figure. Every trifle alarms the guilty; and circumstanced as I then was, so unusual an occurrence startled me. But it was too late for retreat; and impatient of notice myself, I yet felt impelled to advance, and examine more closely this unlooked-for stranger.

He betrayed no desire to elude me; on the contrary, he remained motionless until I was

within a few paces of him; and though his eyes were intently fixed upon me, he opened not his lips, but gave me full time to examine in detail the whole of his singular aspect. He seemed to be a man of middle age, and was scantly clad in a robe of shreds and patches, over which hung a leopard-skin: his huge mass of hair was twisted fantastically with a few faded flowers and feathers, in many plies about his head, and was sprinkled with ashes; but beneath this wild head-dress spread a forehead of so much majesty,—and eyes of such piercing lustre shone from under their stern but placed brows, that, however absurd might seem the fashion of his garments, no one could for a moment doubt that their owner belonged to a noble class of beings.

I had frequently seen dervishes and calunders, who, revered and protected among the tribes of the Desert, came freely among them on their pilgrimages to sell charms and cure diseases; but though the garb of this man in some sort resembled that which was worn by such persons, it was evident that he was of a far superior cast to them.

I remained standing awe-struck before him, while he rose, and with dignity thus addressed me: "Young man! how comes it that, though Allah in his bounty has traced thee out a useful and a glorious path, thou in thy folly strivest to counteract

so benevolent a decree, and perversely seekest the road that leads to misery and ruin?"—"And who art thou, that thus arraignest me so harshly?" replied I, struggling for language and for courage, for my guilty conscience had made a coward of me; "and who mayest thou be, who, though unknown to me, would seem to read my secret thoughts?"—"Who I am," replied the Dervish solemnly, "it boots thee not to know; enough for thee to learn, that ere thou sawest the light—before thy mother bore thee, I read thy destiny,—and then I warned her, as now I warn thee. Be wise in time, and shun the misery which awaits on obstinacy and folly: forget not her last words, her dying prayers! Dost thou in truth feel that thou hast harshly been arraigned? is thy conscience, then, at rest? are the secret thoughts of thy bosom calm, virtuous, and tranquil? Thou knowest well they are not! With guilt upon thy soul hast thou wandered to this solitude; and the misery which springs from folly and from guilt will pursue thee wherever thou mayest go! Thou hast betrayed thy master and thy friend! Thou hast abused unsuspecting innocence; and, already half apostate to thy faith, thou hast reconciled thy easy conscience to an act of treason against thy native land!"

The words of this extraordinary being penetrated my soul: conviction sat upon his tongue:

was there not truth in all he said? Poor Shireen! had I not ruined her unsuspecting innocence, and betrayed my master's confidence? and was I not meditating to follow that master, to war against my own tribe, in the heart of my native country? I wrung my hands in anguish. "Whatever thou art," cried I, "thou hast judged me severely, but truly; but the physician who discovers the disease, should also know the remedy: —save Shireen, if not the guilty Ismael, from the fatal consequences of a blind and headlong passion; let not the innocent suffer for the guilty! If there must be a victim, I am ready for my fate; but if sincere repentance can atone for unintended crime, vouchsafe to assist a wretch who sees nothing but ruin and misery around him!"

"The passions and the follies of youth bring their own punishment," replied the Dervish, in a tone still solemn, but less severe; "and those who sow the seed of vice, must reap its fruits! But thy case, young man, is not hopeless, for thy guilt was not premeditated; sorrow and misfortune thou must indeed endure, but brighter days shall come. For the partner of thy folly, fear thou not; the blossom of her life shall be preserved—more I may not say. For thyself, the current of thy destiny rolls on, and may not be stayed: here there is no abiding place for thee! Contrive not the means nor manner of thy de-

parture: the former shall be provided, the latter thou canst not choose. A star that controls the fortunes and glory of Irān, has arisen in the East! to its blazing course shall thy destiny be united; and if thy conduct be wise, and thy heart strong, it shall lead thee on to prosperity and honour." The Dervish paused: his keen burning eye was gazing on vacancy from under a contracted brow. I waited awhile in mute expectation, and then attempted to press farther enquiries regarding those things of which he had spoken; but he stopped me abruptly: "Seek not to know more, young man! My mission is ended for the present; be prudent and virtuous, and we may meet again: may God protect thee now! Dare not to follow me: I go my way—do thou go thine!" So saying, he turned from me, and was soon lost to view among the windings of the rocks.

Amazed, but, on the whole, relieved by the result of this mysterious interview, I quitted the dell, and returned to the camp, where nothing was spoken of, for several days, but the projected expedition towards Koordistan. It was some days before I had an opportunity of communicating to Shireen the encouragement I had received to hope for the safety of both; nor could I at that time give her a full account of my adventure; prudence required our being seen together as little as possi-

ble, to prevent the chance of untimely discoveries; and I awaited with no small impatience the events predicted by the Dervish.

These did not tarry long. But few days had passed, when the Khan, taking with him a small party of chosen followers, left the camp on an expedition which, it was understood, would detain him several days away. The caution which had been observed between Shireen and myself was at this time unfortunately relaxed, and several interviews took place between us, some of which, as it too surely appeared, had been observed.

On the evening succeeding one of these meetings, as I was returning to the tents, I perceived my friend Selim advancing precipitately to meet me. His air was disordered, and his manner such as to fill me with an undefinable alarm. "Whither go you, unhappy wretch!" at length cried he: "know you what has happened? are you aware that your crimes are discovered, and that death awaits you if found? Dumb with amazement and conscious guilt, I could not utter a word, and Selim, after a pause, resumed: "Oh, Ismael! is it thus you have requited us? is it thus you have stung the bosoms that nourished you? You have spread discord and dishonour in a family that gave you shelter when you were destitute, and you have plucked and destroyed the rose which you knew to be destined for another. Bloody should be

the vengeance which the son of Omer, the brother of Shireen, should exact from the destroyer of his sister; but Selim cannot deal the blow to Ismael—I cannot destroy the creature we all have cherished—the friend I once loved so well; though duty, though honour may command it, I cannot hate you! I never can forget the hours we have spent together, the love we bore each other. While Selim lives, Ismael shall not be sacrificed; and may he never feel the misery he has caused to those who loved him best!"

I was yet too much confounded to speak, but the last words of Selim cut me to the heart, and restored me to recollection: the idea that he believed me to be a traitor, I could not endure. "Selim," said I, with eyes fixed on the ground, "I am a wretch it is too certain, and unworthy of life; but I am no deliberate villain:—the wrong I have done is indeed great, and dreadful, I fear, may be its consequences, but, Heaven is my witness, it was unpremeditated. Give me up to the worst that can befall me, but believe my assertion, my oath, if you will, that I never conceived a thought of ill to any of your house, and last of all, could I have deliberately injured you, my brother in love and kindness, or her whose life I would die to save! I am guilty—most unfortunate, but no cold, deliberate seducer; nor can I brook that I should owe my life to you, while you believe me

such." My earnestness was not lost on Selim. "I wish to believe you, Ismael," said he; "but, however that may be, my course is clear, my plan fixed:—there is no time to be lost—you cannot return to the tents—you must instantly fly,—and I will provide the means. You must with all possible secrecy and speed make off to the little mount directly south of where we stand, called Altoun Tuppeh,* and, proceeding one mile east from thence, you will find a small retired hollow;—there wait for me—I shall not be long;—no words—begone!"

Stupified as I was by this sudden and alarming information, I failed not to move at a rapid pace in the direction of the Altoun Tuppeh—which I fortunately reached without interruption. As the late events and their probable consequences passed rapidly through my thoughts, the words of the Dervish occurred to me, "Thou shalt soon quit this spot:"—over the time or the manner I was to have no control. How soon was all fulfilled! It inspired me with confidence, as far as regarded myself;—but then the thought of Shireen, exposed to all the rage and cruelty of her father and his household, recurred to my mind, and I would with joy have braved any danger myself, for the chance of rescuing her from such a fate. But here again the Dervish's

* Or "Golden Hillock." Tuppeh, signifies a "hillock."

prediction came to my recollection with comfort; for had he not assured me that the partner of my weakness should also escape? — and if his prophetic declarations with regard to myself were likely to be accomplished, was he not also worthy of credit in those which concerned her?

By the time I reached the Altoun Tuppeh, I had somewhat regained my self-possession, and reasoned myself into a degree of calmness, although still full of anxiety, and impatient for the arrival of my friend. The sun had set; and, in spite of the importance of concealment, I could not help ascending the little mount, which commanded a distant view of our encampment. There it lay, partly seen, partly hid by the river banks, tranquil and calm by the sweet evening light—many of the tents were full in view, dotting the green meadows with their black lines, and the position of others might be traced by the bushes or sand-hillocks near them;—and there, under its great sycamore-tree lay the delightful Chushmah Jemallee, by the green banks of which I had spent so many and so happy hours—now, never more to be seen by me. My heart swelled to suffocation;—I threw myself on the sand with my eyes fixed on the home of my youth, and sobbed aloud.

The declining light soon warned me that I must lose no time in seeking the place of appoint-

ment; and rousing myself from this mood of sadness, I soon reached the spot indicated by Selim. It was a small hollow, which, in the winter season, was commonly filled with snow or water, but was at this time dry. It formed a secure hiding-place in the Desert; and I took possession of it, ascending now and then to the brink, to listen and to gaze for the approach of my friend.

Who can describe the torture of suspense, when the weary hours flit slowly by, and the heart, feverish and restless, grows sick from hope deferred! Long did I look in vain for Selim. I watched the stars as they rose and set, and, endless though the time appeared, I saw that hour after hour elapsed, and doubt seemed fast yielding to the certainty of some great evil. I began at length to consider what might be the chances of escape, should I attempt it, without any longer waiting for Selim. The night was waning rapidly, and only at night was escape to be thought of. My sole path of safety lay towards Khorasan, and the nearest point inhabited by my countrymen lay distant three long days' journey of the best-mounted horseman. I had neither horse, nor provisions, nor arms, except the dagger at my girdle: my clothes, my language, and manners were Toorkoman: even should I succeed in gaining the frontiers, what fate could I expect but

that which would be dealt to an enemy? But, in truth, what chance was there that a youth, even strong and active as I was,—on foot, hungry, unarmed, and ignorant of the way, should ever reach the frontiers?—I remained bewildered and perplexed.

Thus anxiously and heavily passed the time. It was little past sunset when I reached the hollow, and now the position of the stars declared that it wanted but one hour of midnight. At this moment, while sitting absorbed in painful reflection on the side of the chasm, the sound of a horse-tramp seemed borne towards me on the gentle breeze of night. Cautiously I stole to the top of the bank, and, laying my head on the ground, listened attentively. It came again, and nearer—oh! the deep, the mixed anxiety of that moment!—but it did not last. I ventured now to raise my head, and, looking along the horizon, saw, relieved against the clear sky, the dark figure of a single horseman approaching rapidly. He was soon at hand, and the sound of my own name, pronounced in a subdued voice, convinced me that it was my friend.

"I have kept you long waiting," said he, springing from his horse, "but it was not to be avoided; my preparations have been ready these many hours, but it is scarcely one since I left the camp:—jealousy is all awake, and when they learn

your absence, which has as yet been concealed, their rage will know no bounds."—" Ah, my friend, my patron," cried I, " how can I tell you all I have endured since you left me? Your coming is as the water of life to a dying man. But tell me, tell me, how fares the unhappy victim of my guilty thoughtlessness? for indeed, my dear Selim! the act which has created all this misery proceeded from no deliberate guilt; it was the offspring alone of youthful imprudence and unchecked affection; and God knows, if my life could restore the unfortunate Shireen to innocence and happiness, I would freely give it—I would sacrifice it with my own hand."—" I believe it, Ismael," returned Selim, " I believe it, for I wish to do so. I think you could not act the serpent's part, and deliberately sting those who fostered you. But the deed is done—the consequences alone are now our care; and we must try to render them as little calamitous as possible. For Shireen you need have no anxiety, I pledge myself for her safety,—I cannot say more at present; we have now to secure yours."—" But how did the discovery take place?" cried I.—" Talk not of it," replied he; " I cannot bear the subject now: in a word, you have long been watched, for neither you nor my sister are without your enemies. And in truth, Ismael, when I learnt what had occurred, my first emotion was that of rage and indignation against the

betrayer of my sister; but an interview with the poor girl softened my wrath. When I saw her, dying as she then thought, and heard her swear that however imprudent, however blameable you might be, you were in truth no seducer; when, sinking under her misery and terror, pale and breathless, she conjured me to save Ismael, to save that friend who had exposed his life for mine, I could hold out no longer. I thought of your frank and noble disposition, so remote from deliberate treachery or falsehood—of your devotion and love to myself, of your steady zeal and fidelity to my family, and I felt that you must be less guilty than unfortunate. I resolved to save you, cost what it might; and I swore to Shireen that no harm should fall on Ismael or on herself while Selim lived—so might Allah help him at his need! My arrangements are now complete, and not a moment must be lost in flying from this place. Should the Khan find you here, not all the kindness he once felt for you, not all my efforts in your favour, would avail for a moment—you were lost without remedy:—it is fortunate for us that he is at present engaged at a distance. Come, the night is far spent, you must be many fursungs* from hence before morning breaks. Here is a horse which you know well, for he was your

* Fursung, is the Greek *parasang*—a Persian measure of distance, nearly equal to four miles.

favourite; he carried you on your first expedition with me; a better than Boorrauk* cannot be found in all the Kara-coum:† he is yours. And here is a scymetar, the work of the celebrated Daood Jeeshagur, of Mushed: it was taken from a Persian khan of no mean name, and will serve you well at your need. Here too is a spear, with a bow and a quiver of arrows, all of the best our camp affords; and here are Kuzzilbash garments,—your safety will require them when you reach the borders. Besides, you will find in those joals‡ barley-bread and corn, enough to support yourself and your horse for five days, and also a small supply of gold, which you will need until you obtain some service; there is but little of it, for gold and silver abound not among us Toorkomans. These things, Ismael, accept as the last offers of one who was once your friend—who still, after all that has passed, cannot force himself to hate you."—His voice faltered—my own was choaked, but I attempted to articulate a few words.—"Do not interrupt me," resumed he,

* Boorrauk, which signifies "lightning," was also the name of the Prophet's.

† Kara-coum, "black sand," or desert, a Turkish expression, often applied to the extensive desert on the eastern bank of the Caspian Sea.

‡ Joals are bags made of canvass or carpet stuff, for containing clothes or other necessaries on a journey, and are carried slung one on each side the horse.

"we have no time for weakness; listen to my directions, they are essential to your safety. As you leave this spot, direct your course south-west, to the point where yon red star will set three hours hence. You must proceed rapidly over these sandy plains and clayey flats, and continue after sunrise till you see some low hillocks on your right—one of these is crowned by a remarkable height, which you cannot fail to observe; and a mile and a half due south from them, there are some wells in a low marshy spot, and some herbage which will serve as food for your horse; there you must halt and refresh—but examine the ground from the distant height, and see that it is unoccupied before you approach it; strangers are dangerous. But there is little risk of pursuit in that direction, I shall take care to lead it otherwise."

In this manner did Selim, with a zeal worthy of a more deserving object, restraining an indignation which he could not but feel, provide for the safety of one who had so deeply, though unintentionally injured him; and thus he pointed out the course and cautions to be observed on the whole way to the confines of Koordistan; which, provided I succeeded in my attempt, he calculated I should reach about the district of Dereguz. "And now," said he, when he had finished his directions, "in the name of God, Ismael, mount and set for-

ward, and may the protection of Allah, and the aid of Moorteza Allee,* ever accompany you!"

It is needless to tell the tears that I shed, or the vain attempts I made to express the gratitude and affection that filled my soul for this inestimable friend; nor can I describe the acuteness of my feelings when thus quitting him for ever. Guilty as I must have been in his eyes, I dared not seek to embrace him; I felt that he could not but repulse me. Nor was Selim's distress inferior to mine: proud and high-minded, he struggled with his feelings till the last; but when he saw me humbled to the dust by his goodness—wrung with anguish, yet not daring to approach him, he could hold out no longer, his sternness gave way—he threw his arms around me, and strained me, for a moment, to his heart. "Khodah Hafiz!"† cried he, in a broken voice, releasing me;—and rushing past me, he was soon lost in the darkness. That embrace, that blessing from Selim, was worth more to me than all he had done for my safety; it was the pledge of forgiveness and reconciliation; it was balm to my wounded spirit. May the blessing of Allah forsake me, when I forget him and his unfailing attachment!

* Allee, the beloved of God! a designation by which Allee is often invoked for assistance, in the hour of difficulty or danger.

† "May God protect, or remember you!" one of the most common, expressive, and affectionate "farewells," in use among the Persians.

While Selim was giving me the directions for my route, I had accoutred myself, given him my Toorkoman jubbah and cap, and put on the Kuzzilbash habit he had brought. I now mounted my horse, and took the direction he had indicated.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DESERT.

The heaviness of my heart for a while seemed to extend its influence even to my horse; and lost in mournful musings I proceeded but slowly onward. A slight stumble, from the roughness of the ground, first roused my attention, and I saw with alarm that I had diverged greatly from the proper course. I lost no time in resuming it, and, resolving to be more cautious in future, urged the animal into a more rapid pace. The remainder of the night wore anxiously away; but every hour, as it passed without alarm or indication of pursuit, increased my confidence, and encouraged my hopes of escaping from the danger with which I was surrounded.

The grey dawn at last appeared, and, as the objects around me became visible by its uncertain light, I could detect some inequalities on the horizon, which I concluded to be the hillocks described

to me by Selim. As the light increased, however, I became aware that these appearances were nothing more than trifling irregularities on the extensive plain before me, magnified into importance by the twilight and vapours of morning. Nothing real met my eye but the grey and boundless desert of sandy downs, interspersed with stripes of hard clay, on which my horse and I were the only living things. A sense of awe, and a loneliness hitherto unknown, pervaded my soul, and disposed it to devout contemplation. What, indeed, awakens religious devotion like misfortune and fear?—they are far more persuasive to the mind than the most touching discourse of the holiest Moollah. As the increasing light announced the hour of prayer, I threw myself from my horse and performed my numaz,* with more energetic sincerity than I ever remember to have done before; nor did I spare the sand of the Desert, which in such cases, the Prophet—blessed be his name!—directs the faithful to use instead of water for their ablutions.

After commending myself to Allah, and calling on Moorteza Allee for assistance, I proceeded as nearly in the proper direction, as, judging by the position of the sun, I could determine. Still no range of sand-hills appeared; and what was worse,

* Numaz—stated prayers, which good Mussulmans perform five times a day.

no symptom of any spot likely to afford water. The thirst, which had in a great degree been repressed by the cold of night, now, as the day advanced, began to grow painful; and was increased by the light particles of sand which, put in motion by the breeze, entered my mouth and parched up my throat and nostrils. My horse too, was evidently suffering under the same distress; his breath became uneasy, and his wide nostrils inflamed and dry. There was no help, however, and nothing remained for us but to push forward, in hopes of either falling in with the watering station described by Selim, or some other of those thinly scattered spots where a slight degree of verdure indicates moisture and the vicinity of wells. It is true that such spots, however essential to my existence now, were fraught with danger; as it is there that parties of the Desert tribes are most generally to be met with: but my situation was becoming every moment more critical, and it was better even to die by the spears of enemies, than to perish by thirst or suffocation in the sands of the Desert.

While I thus pursued my way in perplexity and doubt, I thought that I perceived a cloud of dust rising in the horizon to the south-east. At first, I took it to be caused by one of those whirlwinds which, even in the calmest day, will often appear in the Desert, raising its sand to the hea-

vens; but on more attentive observation, it seemed too low and too dense for one of these: it also left a train behind it to the south, as if it was moving in a contrary direction. Alarmed at this sight, I instantly dismounted, that I might observe what was passing with less risk of being myself discovered.

It chanced that, a little to the left of the spot from whence I first perceived the dust, there was a small ridge of sand, rising seven or eight feet above the general level; I led my horse to the shelter of this, and lying down so as to command a view over its crest, I waited the issue, in breathless anxiety.

For some time every thing was hid from my view by intervening irregularities; but scarcely had a quarter of an hour elapsed, before I observed the cloud of dust nearer than before; and, as it issued from beyond the point of another sand-hill, I could distinguish a dense mass, like a body of men or cattle, from which now and then flashed the gleam of a burnished weapon. At first I thought they were marching directly towards me, and believed discovery inevitable. I dreaded lest my horse, with the instinct of its species, might become sensible of the approach of others, and betray me by his neighing, and for awhile the suspense I endured was more painful than discovery itself would have been; but my fears were

relieved by observing that the party was now moving in a course oblique to mine, and that, though so far as a certain point they seemed to be approaching, they were now moving onward, and rapidly getting farther from me. They passed me at a distance of less than a mile, and I could discern that there were at least an hundred horsemen, accompanied by many camels and yaboos* carrying loads.

The dust occasioned by their progress had disappeared, before I ventured to resume my journey, or to emerge from my place of concealment. When at last I cautiously ascended the ridge of sand, behind which I had taken shelter, I looked eagerly around me, but could see neither human being nor animal in the wide expanse before me. After a while, however, my eyes rested on a singular mass rising from the plain, considerably to my left; and upon examining it more particularly, it occurred to me that it resembled the description Selim had given me of the remarkable height, near which water was to be found. The very thought gave life to my hopes, and eagerly mounting, I once more urged on my weary steed.

My distance from the object of my hopes was greater than it at first appeared; but as I approached closer, they were strengthened by observing that it formed the summit of a small range

* Baggage ponies.

of hillocks, as Selim had said, but which distance, and the erroneous direction I had taken at first, had changed in appearance, and at first concealed from view;—and I now discovered how far I had gone astray in the commencement of my journey.

A short while brought me to the foot of the Tuppeh, and my horse, perhaps instinctively inspired by the same hope as myself, pressed forward with more vigour and alacrity. I soon found myself in the track of the very caravan that had so lately passed me; and I moved on with the greater caution, as it appeared clearly to have come from the direction in which my path lay; and doubtless they had refreshed at the very spot which I should have reached early in the day, had I not wandered from my road: I determined, therefore, to follow the track, as the sure means of reaching the watering-place.

It passed to the south-west of the hillock, and after winding, with no small intricacy, among other sand-hills, led me to a level space, where a slight tinge of green declared the existence of moisture. My horse instantly began to stretch his broad nostril to the wind, and whinnied and neighed amain; nor was I void of apprehension lest some lingerers of the party might still be near and take alarm. But all seemed peaceful and lonely; a few embers yet smoking, and the black spots occasioned by fires, marked the place which

the party had occupied, and where probably the wells were to be found. To this spot I proceeded, still cautiously for fear of surprise; but it was needless—I was the only human being near.

Oh! with what delight did I view the yet moist and plashy ground around the spot where they had watered their horses and camels. There, indeed, was the well, its source partly stopped up with sand; a precaution usually adopted in the Desert, both to prevent the water from being lessened by evaporation, and to hide its source from enemies and strangers. This precaution had been but imperfectly taken by the party which had just made use of the well, and it was fortunate for me that it was so, as, had they omitted it altogether, the water would have been too low to enable my horse to reach it, whereas the sand thrown in had raised it without entirely covering it up from view; so that muddy and turbid as it was, my thirsty steed could freely participate in the blessings it afforded. I threw myself on my face beside the delicious element, and drank a long deep draught; then tearing off my clothes, I bathed my head and bosom in the refreshing stream, before it was quite disturbed by my impatient horse, who, plunging his fore legs up to the knees on the other side, greedily satisfied his own longings. I now unbitted him, and loosing his girths, permitted him to go at large among

the herbage near the well, assured that he would not quit this only spot where he could satisfy the cravings of hunger as well as thirst.

I had now a moment for calm reflection; and my thoughts naturally turned on the events of the last few hours. The loss of my way, which I feared might prove my destruction, had, as it appeared, secured my safety. Had no obstacle prevented my reaching the wells as early as might have been expected, I could not have avoided falling into the hands of those who then occupied the place, and they could hardly have been welcome to me; for it has been well observed, that no man in the Desert meets a friend. I returned thanks to Allah for the deliverance I had experienced, and hailed this proof of my lucky fortune as a fair pledge of future success.

I refreshed myself sparingly with some of the provisions which Selim had provided, and a sigh arose in my breast, as I thought of that true and disinterested friend, and of my unfortunate Shireen; for whose fate, in spite of the assurances I had received from Selim and the Dervish, I could not help entertaining the most lively alarm.

I did not dare to remain longer than was absolutely necessary to refresh my horse; as for myself, so strong was the excitement of my mind, that had I been in a state of perfect safety, and had my time been entirely at my own disposal,

sleep would not have visited my eyes; so after a halt of two hours, during which my horse had contrived to crop a good deal of such herbage as had been left, and eaten a few handfuls of barley from my joals,* I prepared to set off afresh.

On casting my eyes around, it seemed to me that the party which had preceded me, must also have been in more than ordinary haste, for several articles lay scattered about, as if forgotten by their owners in the hurry of their departure: besides scraps of provisions, there was a calleeoon,† in which the tobacco was but half-smoked, a handkerchief, and some other trifles of dress; but the only thing which promised to be useful to me was a leathern vessel for drawing and carrying water, which had probably been used to water the camels: this I filled with what water it could easily contain, and very gladly hung it at my saddle-bow.

I now once more mounted and rode forward, directing my course to the southward. It was more than three hours past noon when I left the wells: the sun beat fiercely on my head, and the sand reflected back its rays with painful force; but my noble horse, true to his blood and race, once more bore me swiftly onward. The night closing in, delivered me from the scorching heat, but subjected me to the equally distressing, though

* Travelling bags.

† Calleeoon, a pipe for smoking tobacco through water, universally used in Persia.

less enervating infliction of a severe cold wind, for which I was but ill prepared; and I had to thank the hardihood of my Toorkoman education for the powers of endurance, which enabled me to bear it at all. I was forced, however, from time to time to get off and lead my horse, to restore by exercise the vital heat to my limbs. Long, long did the night appear, as I urged him swiftly through the darkness, and eagerly did I hail the first approach of morning, which would restore to me the blessings of light and heat, although I knew not whether any other relief might accompany them.

It dawned at last; and morning found me still in a wide and trackless waste of sand; which, as the sun arose, was only bounded by those flitting vapours which deceive the thirsty traveller with the belief that water is near, and have thence obtained the name of "the water of the Desert."* In vain I looked for the marks by which my friend Selim had taught me to recognise a place of refreshment. There was but too much cause to fear that I was now in one of those terrible tracks of dry and moving sand, in which no water is ever found, and which sometimes, when set in motion by the wind, swallow up whole caravans and their conductors. Alas! the morning light, so earnestly expected, only dawned to prove that I was surrounded by dangers I had

* Sahrāb, the phænomenon of refraction termed the "mirage."

never dreamt of. The wind, which had blown so piercingly all night, lulled, as it generally does, towards morning; but the hazy vapour, loaded with light particles of sand, through which the sun rose red as blood, gave warning that the calm would not continue long; nor had I pursued my course another hour before the roar of the Desert-wind was heard, columns of dust began to rise in the horizon, and the air became gradually filled with driving sand.

As the wind increased, the whole plain around me, which had been heaped by former tempests into ridges, like the waves of a troubled sea, now got into motion: the sand blew from off their crests, like spray from the face of the waters, and covered myself and my horse with its dense eddies; while, often unable to distinguish the true course, my horse toiled over the ridges, sinking up to the very girths in their deep baffling substance.

I continued for some hours to persevere, struggling against the fury of the gale, when my alarm became increased by observing that my horse, which hitherto had stood out with admirable perseverance, even when his progress was the most painfully impeded by the deep sand, now became terrified and restive. He snorted, reared, and appeared unable, as well as unwilling, to face the sharp drifting of the still increasing storm. In vain I soothed him, or urged him on with

heels and hand; the animal, which hitherto had obeyed my voice almost like an intelligent being, now paid no attention either to caresses or to blows. In the severe squalls that drove past at intervals, he fairly turned his back to them and would not move; and even when the wind lulled for a little, he could hardly be forced to advance a step.

I scorned to yield my life without a struggle, yet saw not the means of preserving it. To abandon my horse would have been, in fact, to give up hope; for I could not have proceeded a single mile on foot: yet to remain stationary, as I was forced to do by the terror of the animal, involved manifest destruction. Every thing that offered resistance to the torrent of sand, which sometimes poured along the earth like a rapid stream of water, was overwhelmed by it in an incredibly short time: even while my horse stood still for a few moments, the drift mounted higher than his knees; and, as if sensible of the danger, he made furious efforts to extricate himself.

Quite certain that my only hope of safety lay in constant motion, and in the chance of gaining the leeward side of some hillock or mass of rock that might afford a shelter till the storm should blow over, I gave up my true course, turned my back to the wind, and made all possible efforts to press forward; and at last, just when both man and

horse were exhausted, during a partial lull, I observed something like a rock or mound of earth looming through the dusky atmosphere.—On approaching it, I discovered that it was the bank of an inconsiderable hollow, which was now nearly filled with sand, and the opposite side of which, being exposed to the wind, had by the same means become merely an inclined plane: beneath this bank I retired, resolved to trust to its protection, rather than run the risk of a farther progress with the imminent peril of perishing in the drifting sand, where vision could not extend for a space of many yards.

For a time my position appeared to be improved, and to afford the shelter required; but it was not long before the wind shifted, and the sand blew more in upon us. Already the choking sensation produced by thirst and the inspiration of the hot penetrating sand had forced me to have recourse, though sparingly, to the water I had fortunately brought along with me. But the relief was little more than momentary; the same sensations returned with greater violence:—my throat and nostrils were parched and filled with sand; my tongue, husky and dry, was almost motionless in my mouth; and it was with feelings of despair that I saw my horse, my only hope, in an equally alarming condition. I took a little of the water that was left, washed his eyes

and nostrils, and even permitted him to drink a few mouthfuls, after performing the same offices to myself: this exhausted my store, and, satisfied that nothing more remained to be done, I leaned my back against the bank, and quietly awaited my fate.

It seemed, in truth, to be rapidly approaching: the wind continued to roar, if possible, with increased violence, and the sand, drifting in from all sides, threatened to bury us as we stood, while the heat and density of the air made it almost impossible to breathe. Indeed, my sensations were so painful that I fully believed death to be nigh at hand. My mind, preternaturally active at this crisis, rapidly surveyed the events of my past life, especially those of the last few days, and shrunk with a pang of mingled impatience and horror from the terrible fate that was now likely to bring all to a close. While thus painfully occupied, and casting about my eyes with a restlessness that partook of the condition of my mind, I caught a glimpse of something like a human being moving through the gloom. Roused by the sight, and indifferent, at such a moment, whether it should prove to be friend or foe, I endeavoured to call out, but could not—my voice died away in a hoarse croak: my horse at the same moment, and, as might have been imagined, with the same intention, uttered a short neigh. Our

efforts were both needless, for the figure, which from the moment we first observed it had kept slowly advancing, moved on at the same steady pace, and now stood before me.—It was the Dervish, Sheikh Allee Calunder.

"Young man," said he, addressing me in his customary solemn voice, "be not dismayed; thou hast now experienced the truth of my words, and wilt hereafter yield them more implicit confidence. I told thee that thou shouldst not long remain an inhabitant of the Desert, a companion of its savage tribes; and that the occasion and means of thy departure would be found without thy seeking; lo! thou hast now left these tribes, and with Allah's help wilt soon quit the Desert. I told thee that sorrow and misfortune would be found in thy path; and is not this a stern earnest of their future presence? But I told thee too, that brighter days should not fail to illuminate thy pilgrimage, and these are yet to come; arise, therefore, and follow me.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CAVE OF THE DERVISH.

WHAT might it be, in the words or the presence of this extraordinary person, that inspired me so instantly with hope and confidence? Did he indeed bear about him some charm or supernatural influence, by which my exhausted strength was restored, as if by magic, at his approach? Such were the thoughts that flitted across my mind as I extricated myself from the sand which had half-overwhelmed me; and having aided the efforts of my horse to get free, led him after this mysterious Dervish, whose spare, sinewy form strode through the furious storm as easily as the spear cleaves the air.

He led the way rapidly and silently along the hollow which I had entered, and which became deeper as we proceeded, with bold and more lofty sides: it seemed strange to me, notwithstanding the cloud of sand, that inequalities so consider-

able could have escaped my observation. Our progress, however, was short;—the Dervish turned to a rocky part of the bank, which somewhat overhung a heap of fragments that had fallen from its summit—several of these, of no small size, he displaced with ease, and discovered a hollow which appeared to extend to a great depth. After he had worked in this way for some moments, he turned to me—"Here, my son," said he, "lend the aid of thy youthful strength to enlarge this opening. The beneficent Allah extends his protection to the brutes of his creation, as well as to sinful man, and commands him to exercise towards other creatures that mercy which he himself receives:—the horse, which hath served thee faithfully, must not be left to perish—the noble animal must likewise enter here." I lent my assistance readily, it is true; but, exhausted with my sufferings, I could effect but little. The Dervish, however, was satisfied; indeed he seemed to require but little help. In a short time the opening was sufficiently enlarged, and my guide, entering, ordered me to follow with my horse. The sagacious animal, instead of starting at the dark abyss, quietly and cautiously followed my steps, as if aware that succour and protection were to be found within.

We proceeded for a few paces in utter darkness, when a feeble yellow ray struck upon the

sight, proceeding from a small iron lamp, which was suspended from the roof by a chain of the same metal. As the eye became accustomed to the dusky light, we found ourselves in a cavern, hollowed either by nature or art out of the solid rock; but the dimensions of which it was impossible to discover.

To one who had suffered as I had done from the suffocating blasts of the Desert, the first and most gratifying sensation in this retreat, was the delicious coolness which pervaded it. The death-like pressure on my heart was instantly removed, and the burning heat of my eyes and the throbbing of my temples were allayed. A moment after we entered, the Dervish brought a large gourd, containing pure cool water; "Here, youth," said he, "drink and refresh thyself; here thou art in perfect security—I will myself attend to the wants of thy steed." So saying, while I drank deep of the cool delicious beverage, and poured a portion over my still burning brows and breast, he took my horse a little on one side, and loosening the saddle and accoutrements, wrung the perspiration from its reeking sides, rubbed it with a woollen cloth, kneaded all its limbs, stretched and cracked its joints, and performed, in short, all that the most experienced groom could have done for a favourite horse: then throwing a numud* over it, he washed

* A felt horse-cloth.

from its mouth and face the sand that covered them, and permitted it to drink sparingly from a vessel which he held to its mouth. He then carefully washed its feet, picking out the sand and fragments of stone that had got fixed about the hoofs, fomenting them, to cool the burning heat which a long and painful march had occasioned.

All this time I looked on in amazement; I was bewildered with all that had passed, and confounded at seeing a man whose appearance proclaimed him to be devoted to meditation and prayer, acquitting himself so ably, in those offices which our warriors pride themselves on performing well. Before he had concluded, however, I rose to assist him, but he gently repelled my offers. "Rest thee, youth," he said, "thou needest repose; leave to me this portion of thy duty: there will be sufficient cause for exertion on thy part ere long." I soon had the satisfaction of seeing my favourite comfortably disposed of in a corner of the cavern, with soft dry sand for his bed, and eating from his tobrah,* with an avidity that proved him not likely to suffer from his severe exertions.

The Dervish now turned his attention to me. "Youth," said he, "the cravings of nature must

* The nose-bag, from which, when filled with chopped straw or corn, and hung round the neck, all the horses of these countries eat their food.

be satisfied. Hunger and thirst, like pain and sickness, were entailed on man through the sin of Sultan Adam, our first parent; but God is merciful, and has provided remedies for our ills, which we may lawfully use: eat, drink, in moderation, and relieve thy weariness by sleep; but never forget that these are all the gifts of Allah, and provoke not his wrath by disobedience to his eternal laws." With these words, he placed before me coarse barley bread, dried fruits, and some crumbs of cheese, with pure water which he brought from a dark recess in the cave. He then invited me to eat, by uttering a solemn Bismillah!* followed by a few words which might have been of prayer, although I understood them not. He did not taste the food himself, but sat beside me in silence while I ate; and when I had finished, fervently ejaculating "Alhumdulillah!"† he prostrated himself, with his forehead touching the sand. He then rose, and leading me to another corner of the cave, where a black felt carpet lay spread on the sand, he bade me "rest in peace," and left me to repose.

Much as I certainly required sleep, it was long ere it visited my eyelids. Both mind and body were fevered, and I tossed and turned upon my

* "In the name of God!" Vide page 99.

† "Thanks! or praise be to God!" used in returning thanks by Mahomedans.

couch, until at length a troubled slumber came over me; but the visions which it brought were filled with the fantastic images of an over-excited mind. At first, innumerable distorted shapes reeled through my brain, among which, though many were familiar, none could be recognized or remembered: they resembled the indescribable phantoms that flit across the imagination of one who is under the influence of opium.

At last the restless shadows assumed more definite shapes, and I could distinguish among them many well-known objects. The scene resembled our encampment at the Chushmah Jemallee, with its Toorkoman inhabitants; and yet its appearance was strangely altered. Shireen, Selim, and others of my intimate friends, were busy among the rest, and they seemed to be preparing a feast. I sought to join them, but some fearful shadow always obstructed my progress:—sometimes Omer Khan would interpose, with his countenance inflamed by wrath and with threatening gestures;—at others, the form of the Dervish, enlarged to preternatural size, would waft the whole away by a motion of his gigantic arm. Again I saw our camp, but it was confused with slaughter and blood; the scene of my first plundering party appeared to be passing in it. I saw the furious rage of my comrades, and heard the yell of despair from the murdered. I saw the women flying, and Shireen among them

screaming for help and mercy. I sought to overtake and save her; but the more I exerted myself, the more I seemed glued to the spot; and the ravishers were just seizing hold of her, when the Dervish suddenly appeared, and bore her away from her disappointed pursuers.

Then came a rapid succession of strange and unintelligible visions. Brilliant assemblies—troops armed and habited, as I had heard of in other lands, in rich apparel, mounted on noble horses; figures of power and majesty marshalling them in order. Then confusion and tumult, battles and plunder, with seas of blood and fire. In all these, the figure of the Dervish was predominant; it was he that filled my imagination, and was the ruling spirit of every thing I saw. As for myself, I was lost in the crowd of images around me, but still I followed the Dervish with my head and eye, as if my being itself depended on his will.

Suddenly there was a great commotion, and I felt the rush of a crowd upon me as if I were the object of their wrath. Omer Khan and Selim were among the first, with wild distorted visages, crying out for vengeance upon the destroyer, and pointing to the shadow of Shireen, which, pale and dying, flitted away in the distance. I shrieked, and endeavoured to avoid them, and stretched out my arms to the passing shadow with a violence

that awoke me—when, looking upward, I saw the Dervish bending over me, holding a lamp in one hand, and with the other gently pressing my arm.

I stared wildly around, believing all I saw to be but the continuation of my dream, while the Dervish soothed me, and endeavoured to recall my bewildered senses: "My son," said he, "thy visions have been troubled and thy sleep unrefreshing. Thy body is distempered; rise, drink this potion, and then thou wilt enjoy repose as well as sleep." I tried to rise, but my head swam round, so that I reeled and fell again upon the couch. I now discovered that I was really awake, but sick and faint: my temples throbbed, and my eyes felt like balls of fire. The Dervish still held the cup containing the potion; my thirst was great, and almost unconsciously I seized and swallowed the refreshing draught. Its effects were speedy: in a few minutes a delightful calm spread throughout my whole frame, and soon after, sleep stole upon me so gently, and continued so sound, that I was insensible to all that passed for many hours.

Recollection did not return with returning consciousness. Darkness was around me, but I could not conceive where I was. I felt about, but nothing within my reach conveyed any information to me: a confused remembrance of terrible things

rushed upon my mind, but supplied no definite idea; and I was striving to recollect my scattered senses, when the light reappeared, and the Dervish, who bore it, came and seated himself beside me.

"Thanks be to Allah, youth," said he, after feeling my pulse and examining my countenance, "thou art now in safety, but thou hast escaped a great danger; the star of thy destiny burns brightly, take heed that thou thwart not its benign influence by thoughtless imprudence. The delay, which thou didst suffer on the way, by straying from thy path, was the means of preventing thy meeting with those from whom thou couldest not have otherwise escaped; and the storm which well nigh proved fatal to thee, has numbered among the victims of its fury those who sought for, and would have found thee, had their progress not thus been stopped short. Learn from these events, young man, that the wisdom of mortals is folly—and adore thou the omnipotence of Allah!

"Thou art now about to enter on another course of life, beset with dangers different in character, but not less perilous than those from which thou hast hitherto escaped. To guard against these, thy prudence will be as needful as thy courage: by nature thou art sufficiently endowed with both,—seek to give them exercise, that they may not fail thee in the hour of need. Yet another day thou must tarry in this asylum to

recruit thy still imperfect strength, for thy toils are not over; on the morrow the dangers of the Desert must again be faced, but they shall be stripped of their terrors to thee, by the directions thou shalt receive for thy path."

It was true that my strength was exhausted; the moment I left my couch I became sensible of my weakness, and was not sorry to contemplate another day's repose, before being again exposed to the toils of a Desert journey. The Dervish now left me to myself, nor was there lack of matter to employ my thoughts.

In the evening, a little before sunset, the Dervish led me from the cavern to the summit of a small eminence above it. The wind was now still, and the sky serene; a low train of purple and golden clouds mustered around the sun as he rapidly descended in the west towards the distant sea of Koolzum.* The change on the face of nature from the preceding day, when terror and desolation were abroad, and the angel of death seemed sweeping through the air on the wings of the whirlwind, was striking enough to affect the most thoughtless. The Desert, indeed, was still spread around us, and it was barren and desolate as ever; but its terrors were gone, and the last rays of the declining sun threw a peaceful gleam over its withered surface, like the calm smile of hope on the face of a dying saint! "Mark,

* The Caspian Sea.

young man," said the Dervish, "how the goodness of Allah can shed beauty over the wilderness, and extract a balm from misfortune, as the bee gathers honey from the bitterest flowers. It is the hour of prayer; let us adore and bless his holy name!"

After our prayers were over, the Dervish, turning towards the South-west, directed my attention to that quarter. "Look yonder," said he; "thou seest that distant object, like a cloud rising above the line of our visible horizon; observe its outline, regular and unchanging in its form, in one part rising to a point, and in others relieved by lighter tints, as if still lighted up by the sun, which has set to us. That is the land to which thou art journeying. These are the lofty mountains of Khorasan, flecked with the first showers of autumnal snow. That lofty peak, which rises to the West of Dereguz, will be thy unerring guide for the rest of thy journey. To the East of it are the mountains, which contain the impregnable fortress of Kelaat; and beyond lie the districts occupied by the warlike Koordish tribes. The distance from hence is still great, and the path will lead thee near the ancient cities of Nissa, Abiverd, and Meheene; and by many villages once populous and rich, now desolate as this Desert. But the ruins of Diroom are still occupied by the crafty Seyed Sultaun, whose country and fol-

lowers must be shunned by thee as a pestilence; for he is opposed to the chief whose fortunes thou art doomed to follow, the great Nader Koolee, whom Providence has destined to be exalted high in fame, as Iskunder,* as Chengiz, or as Timoor.—Avoid, then, the Toorkomans of Diroom, and all the tribes of the Desert. It is with the Kuzzilbashes thou henceforth must associate, and to the Kuzzilbashes thou must look in future for friendship and assistance."

I looked at the Dervish with enquiring eyes. "Yes," continued he, "it is this powerful, this fortunate, this terrible chief, who shall lead thee to fortune and to honour. It is thy happy destiny to follow in the train of that brilliant star, whose light shall shed a lustre on Persia, unknown since the days of the earliest Sooffees.† But it is a red terrific planet, whose course is crossed by many a constellation of evil power, which may render its influence baneful. Praise, praise to Allah! who mercifully hides from his creatures the perfect knowledge of a future, which may teem with misery! And now, my son," continued the Dervish, after a pause, "betake thee to

* Iskunder is the name by which Alexander the Great is known and celebrated over the East.

† The Sooffee or Suffavean dynasty was the most brilliant of the latter dynasties which have ruled over Persia: it includes the reigns of Ismael, Tahmaseb, both the Abbasses, which may be considered the Augustan age of Persia.

repose—to-morrow's sun must see thee on thy way; go forth in the strength of the Almighty, and be thy course bright as virtue, steadfast as truth!" He ceased, and we returned to the cave. Fain would I have sought to learn more of my destiny—to know if I should ever again meet with this mysterious being. But there was a majesty about him that awed the beholder, and I did not dare to question him farther. He quitted me, and I retired to my place of rest. My thoughts for a while dwelt on the words he had uttered regarding my future destiny. I have already said, that the fame of Nader Koolee Beg had extended even into our deserts, and that proposals had been made to our tribe to range themselves along with his enemies against him. I had always contemplated with reluctance the chance of opposing in arms a chief of my own people, and carrying havoc into the bosom of my own country; and it was with joy I hailed the prospect of being relieved from such a necessity. These cheering reflections were soon terminated, however, by a sound sleep, which ceased not till a loud neigh from my horse startled me, and the faint light of a wandering ray told me that it was time to rise and pursue my journey.

Reluctant to seem slothful in the eyes of the Dervish, I was soon equipped, and felt with delight that the vigour of my body was restored, and

with it the energy of my mind; hope sprang fresh in my soul, and brightened all the future, as the beams of the morning-sun gild the summer landscape. Nor was my joy inferior at seeing my trusty steed, as I led him forth from the cavern, equally refreshed, and full of spirits as his master: he pawed the sand, shook his arching crest, and glanced his bright eye upon me, expressing his impatience the while by quick neighings.

I waited for some time in expectation that the Dervish would make his appearance; but though all I could require for my journey stood ready prepared for me, my benefactor was not to be seen. There were my joals replenished with food for myself and provender for my steed, and there was spread my light morning's meal. I hastily partook of it, still hoping that he who supplied it would afford me an opportunity of expressing my gratitude for all his kindness; but the time was passing fast and yet he came not. I then remembered his solemn benediction of the preceding night, and felt that it was his farewell. His advice and his directions for my route had been given me then also, and it remained for me but to avail myself of them and depart.

But what had become of the mysterious being who traversed the pathless Desert as a familiar place, and walked in safety through the storms

where others perished? Long did I muse on this perplexing subject, as mounting my horse I rode forward on my journey; but the more I thought of the adventure and all its circumstances, the more I was bewildered. At length, abandoning all idea of comprehending the mystery, but satisfied that, be he whom he might, he was the agent of a beneficent power, I mentally returned thanks to Allah for all his goodness, and, collecting my scattered senses, urged on my steed in the direction pointed out by the Dervish.

CHAPTER XV.

THE RENCOUNTER.

I PURSUED my way in safety for many hours along the sand, for the landmarks given me by the Dervish were too clear to be mistaken; but I found that the distance to the foot of the hills was much greater than might have been imagined from the view we had obtained of them in the calm hour of morning, before the dust had arisen and dimmed the pure air. Indeed, as the day advanced, the haze entirely obscured them; and it was not till long after the sun had passed the meridian, that I again observed their summits rising above the clouds of dust that still hid their bases from view.

The nature of the country now began to change; tracks of clay and gravel made their appearance, and relieved my horse's steps from the weariness of constantly sinking to the fetlocks in the heavy sand, which had hitherto predominated,

After a while, traces of former cultivation could be detected; channels for irrigation here and there furrowed the ground; from the sides of which, fields producing rich crops of wheat, barley, dourra, and other grains, once received the water that fertilized them. The canals were now dry, and the fields produced only camel's thorn, and other stunted weeds.

I came soon afterwards to a collection of mud-walls, the ruins of some village to which the cultivation had belonged:—the houses were roofless, and the walls had mouldered down from the effects of rain. A few withered creeping plants, the produce of spring and summer, now hung around them, rustling in the wind—the only sound to be heard. The place seemed more desolate even than the Desert, and I shuddered as I passed by this first monument of ruin and decay.

This village was probably among the few that in more peaceable times had crept forward to the confines of the waste, and had consequently been one of the first swept away, when the tribes of the Desert, which for a time had been repelled, rolled back like a furious tide, overwhelming every thing to the very foot of the mountains.

It was a long time after passing these ruins before I found any other vestiges of habitations; but towards evening I observed, both to the right

and left of me, several low lines of broken walls, and the country assumed a more fertile aspect; the earth was better clad with herbage, although it was dry and withered, and cultivation had plainly once abounded.

A few miles farther on, my eyes were gladdened by the sight of a strip of verdure, which I found bordering the bed of a stream, at this time nearly dry: it had been employed to irrigate a great portion of the abandoned cultivation in the neighbourhood, but the watercourses were choked up, and the water spent itself fruitlessly, running at large over the country.

I had now approached so near to the mountains that their features were distinctly visible, projecting, and retiring in great ridges and deep dark valleys. A series of smaller hills continued from their feet, undulating in various irregular swells, till they became lost in a long gradual slope that stretched down to the ground where I stood. This slope was furrowed, and partly fertilized by many streams, the superfluous waters of which were lost in the Desert beyond, or were collected in a single stream, which divides that desert from the more fertile country, all the way to the banks of the Koolzum, into which it falls.

By the time I reached the banks of this stream, the sun had set, and it was necessary to seek

some retreat where I might pass the night, and refresh myself and my horse without fear of discovery. Ascending the river bed, therefore, with this intention, I soon found a recess where I could repose myself, surrounded by green pasture, in which my horse might feed; but as it would have been dangerous to let him go at large all night, I employed myself, for a while, in cutting the longest and thickest of the grass which grew on the banks of the stream, for his night's repast, permitting him to pasture at will until dark; and securing him then close to the spot I meant to occupy, after a moderate meal, I commended myself to Allah, and lay down to rest.

The loud neighing of my horse awoke me with a start, as the first light of dawn broke in the East. Quickly springing on my feet, and grasping my spear and scymetar, which lay under my head, I looked around for the cause of alarm. Nor did it long remain doubtful, for, at the distance of scarce two hundred yards, I saw a single horseman advancing.—To tighten my girdle round my loins, to string my bow, and prepare two or three arrows for use, was but the work of a few moments; before these preparations, however, were completed, the stranger was close at hand. Fitting an arrow to my bow, I placed myself upon guard, and examined him narrowly as he approached.

He was a man of goodly stature, and powerful frame; his countenance, hard, strongly marked, and furnished with a thick black beard, bore testimony of exposure to many a blast, but it still preserved a prepossessing expression of good humour and benevolence. His turban, which was formed of a cashmere shawl, sorely tached and torn, and twisted here and there with small steel chains, according to the fashion of the time, was wound around a red cloth cap, that rose in four peaks high above the head. His oemah, or riding coat, of crimson cloth much stained and faded, opening at the bosom, showed the links of a coat of mail which he wore below; a yellow shawl formed his girdle; his huge shulwars, or riding trowsers, of thick, fawn-coloured Kerman woollen-stuff, fell in folds over the large red leather boots in which his legs were cased: by his side hung a crooked scymetar in a black leather scabbard, and from the holsters of his saddle peeped out the butt-ends of a pair of pistols—weapons of which I then knew not the use, any more than of the match-lock which was slung at his back. He was mounted on a powerful but jaded horse, and appeared to have already travelled far.

When this striking figure had approached within thirty yards, I called out in the Turkish language, commonly used in the country, "Whoever thou art, come no nearer on thy peril, or I

shall salute thee with this arrow from my bow!" —"Why, boy," returned the stranger, in a deep manly voice, and speaking in the same tongue, "thou art a bold lad, truly! but set thy heart at rest, I mean thee no harm."—"Nay," rejoined I, "I am on foot and alone. I know thee not, nor thy intentions; either retire at once, or show thy sincerity by setting thyself on equal terms with me; —dismount from thy steed, and then I fear thee not, whatever be thy designs.—Beware!" and so saying, I drew my arrow to the head, and pointed it towards him. "By the head of my father!" cried the stranger, "thou art an absolute youth! —but I like thee well; thy heart is stout, and thy demand is just;—the sheep trusts not the wolf when it meets him in the plain, nor do we acknowledge every stranger in the Desert for a friend. See," continued he, dismounting actively, yet with a weight that made the turf ring again, "See, I yield my advantage;—as for thy arrows, boy, I fear them not;" with that he slung a small shield, which he bore at his back, before him, as if to cover his face, in case of treachery on my part, and leaving his horse where it stood, he advanced to me.

Taught from my youth to suspect and to guard against treachery, I still kept a wary eye on the motions of the stranger. But there was something in his open, though rugged countenance, and

manly bearing, that claimed and won my confidence. Slowly I lowered my hand, and relaxed the still drawn string of my bow, as he strode up to me with a firm composed step.

"Youth," said he, "had my intentions been hostile, it is not thy arrows or thy bow, no, nor thy sword and spear, that could have stood thee much in stead. I am too old a soldier, and too well defended against such weapons, to fear them from so young an arm. But I am neither enemy nor traitor to attack thee unawares: I have travelled far during the past night, and mean to refresh myself awhile in this spot before I proceed on my journey;—thou meanest not," added he with a smile, "to deny me the boon which Allah extends to all his creatures? What! still suspicious? Come then, I will increase thy advantage, and try to win thy confidence." With that he unbuckled his sword, and threw it, with his matchlock, upon the turf a little way from him. "See me now unarmed,—wilt thou yet trust me?" Who could have doubted longer? I threw down my bow and arrows: "Pardon," cried I, "my tardy confidence; but he that has escaped with difficulty from many perils, fears even their shadow:—here," continued I, "are bread and salt, eat thou of them, thou art then my guest, and that sacred tie secures the faith of both." The stranger, with another smile, took the offered food.

"See, youth, I am forward to prove my sincerity. I consent to be thy guest, as thou wast first in occupation of this spot; and, by the holy Caaba,* I am like to profit by it, seeing thy stores seem better and larger than mine; it is some days since I have eaten a bit of bread like this. But now, with thy leave, I shall bring hither my weary horse, that he too may rest and be refreshed. Here, Roushun!† hither, hither!"—he gave a long whistle, and the animal came trotting to his call; then loosing the saddle and appurtenances, he scraped the sweat and dust from his sides, rubbed him heartily for a while, pressed his muscles, and drew his joints after the fashion of a good and careful groom; then throwing over him a numud,‡ which had been fastened to his saddle, he permitted him to graze at will. In all this I assisted him, and gained many commendations for my willingness and dexterity.—"So! well done, young man, one may see that thou hast learnt to tend a horse;—there, rub his nose well; lift up that off fore-leg till its joints crack again; now pull his tail, nothing pleases a wearied horse more than that;

* The temple, or mosque, at Mecca, towards which all Mussoolmans turn their faces at the time of prayer. This edifice, or part of it, is attributed to Abraham, and is considered the holiest earthly object of Mahomedan regard.

† Roushun,—light, splendour,—a common name for a favourite horse in Persia.

‡ A horse-cloth of felt.

lend thy hand to rub this side a little dryer:—there, that will do; that's well—we'll just clap this numud on him to keep his loins warm; and now, my poor Roushun, go fill thy belly, for thou hast much need."

After this task had been performed, the stranger, turning to me, said, "See, the first beams of the sun have lighted up that distant mountain; it is the hour of prayer, a duty I never neglect, neither shouldst thou omit it, if thou be'est a good Mussoolman.

The stranger performed his ablutions in the clear stream, and used it as men do who have toiled sore and long. He bathed his head, his breast, and feet, and let the cool water stream over his black bushy beard. He then prayed long and devoutly, prostrating his forehead upon a piece of clay brought from Kerbelah.* Being less accustomed to protracted devotions, my prayers were sooner over, and I felt half ashamed at the circumstance: at last he rose and approached me, "And now, youth, let us see what we can muster for breakfast."

* The place, in Arabia, where Hassan and Hoossain, sons of Allee, were murdered and buried. It is a very holy place of pilgrimage for the Sheahs, and it is customary for all of that sect to carry with them a piece of clay brought from thence, and stamped with the seal of the high priest of the tomb, which they place before them during prayers, and press their forehead against it when prostrating themselves.

He took a small pair of joals from behind his holsters, and poured their contents on a handkerchief which he spread on the grass. Some fragments of tough old bread, mingled with crumbs of cheese, and a few withered roots of garlic, were all that appeared. "Wullah!"* cried he, opening wide his eyes, here is a pretty mess for a hungry man indeed! the Kumbucht† has treated me worse than I believed; but never mind. I hope, young man, you are better supplied; if not, come share with me and welcome; there is enough to keep life in our bodies till we reach better quarters."

"Nay," said I, "remember thou art my guest, we join stocks on this occasion, at all events, and I have plenty for both." With that I produced my store, which, thanks to the Dervish's bounty, was very respectable: it consisted, it is true, only of barley bread, but less ancient than that of my new friend, with some tolerable cheese, some dried plums of Bockhara, and grape jelly, all good of their kinds, and all in sufficient quantity to quiet any scruples he might have felt at interfering with my proper allowance. Indeed, such scruples seemed to be foreign to his frank and liberal nature, and he eyed the eatables with a

* A common exclamation of surprise,—literally, "By God!"

† Ill-fated!—wretch!—a common term of reproach or abuse in Persia.

look that sufficiently declared how welcome they were.—"Hah, my young friend, you travel well provided—such things are not to be picked up in every corner of the Desert—but let us fall to, Bismillah!"*—"Bismillah," echoed I; and we fell upon the victuals like men who had fasted long, and who might not soon again find wherewithal to satisfy their appetites.

At length, both being satisfied, and a pause having ensued, the stranger took occasion to remark on the singularity of finding a youth like myself alone in so dangerous and desert a country. "By thy dress," added he, "thou shouldst be a Kuzzilbash, but thy tongue and thy bearing tell a different tale." Greatly as I had been prepossessed in favour of my new friend by his frank deportment, I did not think it altogether prudent to intrust him with my story; I therefore merely replied, that I had travelled from a great distance, and had encountered many dangers, but that, by the mercy of God, I had been preserved in the greatest extremity, and got my store of provisions replenished when nearly exhausted.

"Well," said the stranger, "I press not to know thy secret: yet thou art young; and though bold and cautious for thy years, mightest not be the worse for advice or assistance from one who has

* "In the name of God!" the common Mahomedan grace; an exclamation also common upon all occasions.

seen something of the world, and who well knows every foot of these dangerous plains. Thou hast seen that I seek not to harm thee, and I tell thee, youth, there is something in thy look that draws me strongly to thee. Thy garb, as I said before, would speak thee a Kuzzilbash, but thy horse and his harness, with thy spear, bow and arrows, are those of the sons of the Desert:—nay, I might say, for well I know their fashion, that they belong to the tribe of Tekeh;—yet there is something of more noble lineage in thy large dark eyes, thy high, straight nose, and the smile which plays around thy mouth. But be thou who thou mayest, Ibrahim Beg Keerkloo would never take a base advantage, even of a foe, whose guest he hath been, with whom he hath eaten bread and salt, and whose hand has been given, as to a friend, in the broad Desert!"

"Keerkloo!" demanded I, looking earnestly in the warrior's face; "then art thou an Affshar?"*—"Ay!" rejoined he, "an Affshar I am, and not of the meanest family, although many are the changes of fortune that I and my kindred have known."—"I too am an Affshar," cried I, my heart warming to my frank-hearted clansman as I spoke,—"I too am an Affshar! and if I err not much, of the family of Keerkloo also!"—

* A noble Turkish tribe, dwelling partly in Azerbijan, partly on the confines of Khorasan. Nader Shah was of this tribe.

"Thou an Affshar?" cried Ibrahim: "thou of the family of Keerkloo? By the tomb of the Prophet, youth, but this sounds strangely!—and yet that countenance—it speaks the truth for thee; methinks I could read it in thy face! But, then, from whence comest thou now? and who is thy father?"—"Whence I am come, thou mayest know hereafter," returned I; "and, for my father, know that many years have passed since he went to share the joys of Paradise,—when all his family except myself, and great part of his clan, fell beneath the spears of that desert tribe, from which even now thou deemedst me to be sprung. My father was Moorteza Khan of Karabulagh, who resided at Khojahdeh, once the principal village of that district."—"Thou the son of Moorteza Khan Keerkloo? thou the child of my old friend and companion in arms? By the head of my father, welcome to Ibrahim! and may the hour of our meeting be propitious!"

With that he rose, and embracing me, kissed me with great zeal three times on both cheeks, and held me at arm's length, as if to look for the likeness he expected to find in confirmation of my assertion.—"I must believe thee, youth!" at last continued he; "that open front and steady look could never support a falsehood; and in thy youthful features I can trace the sterner traits of thy brave father. But how didst thou escape

the ruthless sword that destroyed thy whole house? and how is it that I now find thee wandering so near the haunts of these savage hordes; so near, too, to the scene of thy family's destruction?"

"The story," answered I, "is long, and would require more time than I should judge may safely be given to it here; but this I may tell thee,—for be it prudent or otherwise, there is something which bids me confide in thee, and young and inexperienced in the world as I am, I fain would have the aid and counsel of some one better known to its ways,—I have fled from that very tribe of Tekeh, whose tents, from the time of my father's murder, have served his son as a home: I now seek to be re-united to my countrymen and tribe; and I am on my way to join that gallant captain, their chief ornament and support, the victorious Nader; if the services of one so young and inexperienced may be accepted by that chief, whose fame has penetrated even to the remote corner where our tents were pitched."

"By the sword of Allee, they shall be accepted!" cried the warm-hearted Ibrahim. "To the camp of Nader thou shalt indeed go, nor shalt thou want a guide and a guard: the brother of Nader shall himself lead thee to him, nor shall his own welcome from the chief be the less warm because he presents to his acceptance the scion of a noble

stock, the son of a brave and highly-valued kinsman. In me you see Ibrahim, the unworthy brother of that luminary, which, like the sun, has risen in the East to shed its reviving influence over its own Khorasan, and enlighten all Persia with its beams!"

It was now my turn to gaze: young and passionately fond of enterprize, nothing connected with a chief so high in fame as Nader could be indifferent to me; and thus, at the very outset of my adventures, in a manner so extraordinary and unlooked for, to meet with the brother of that chief himself, and that too at the very moment when I stood most in need of assistance and advice,—the influence of my happy star was so powerful and so distinct, that I was penetrated with gratitude and amazement. In Ibrahim I felt that I had acquired a warm, a hereditary friend: meeting with him was like regaining my country and my family. New hopes, new energy sprang up in my soul, and but for one dark cloud, which still gave its tinge to my destiny, all the future would have been bright and glowing in my eyes. Visions of glory and of happiness flashed across my thoughts, nor could I for a while reply to the animated assurances of protection which Ibrahim so frankly offered me.

"Allah Kereem! God is merciful!" exclaimed I at last; "he deigns to let his favours shine upon a

wretch like me! And will the brother of Nader indeed befriend an orphan who can proffer nothing in return but his gratitude and zeal? With confidence, O Ibrahim! do I place myself in thy hands, assured that in so doing I am fulfilling the will of the Almighty! Ah, Dervish! how true a prophet art thou!—how vain is it to strive against the will of Providence!—how impossible to contravene the decrees that have been registered since the beginning of time! The star of Ismael's destiny is indeed rising; and it is truly from Kuzzilbashes that he has already received, and must in future seek support."

The curiosity of Ibrahim was again excited by my last exclamations, which were uttered aloud; and I promised to satisfy it by relating my whole story as soon as an opportunity should occur. He then adverted to the circumstances that had occasioned his being found himself alone and in so perilous a spot. "My brother," said he, "was summoned to the neighbourhood of Khabooshan, by reports of disturbances among the Koords of that district—no uncommon event, indeed. He sent me to recruit near Semulghan, and to confirm, if I could, the friendly tribes of these parts in their allegiance. I raised a good many men, and sent them direct to my brother; but there were threatening appearances in the Desert, and I wished to see with my own eyes the extent of real danger;

so, taking a few steady men with me, I took this road by the skirts of the hills."—"And what has become of your escort?" enquired I,—"did you find the reports correct?"—"Faith! not entirely unfounded, it must be owned," rejoined he; "for though I have seen no large bodies of troops, there certainly are plunderers abroad. Last evening, while passing through an ugly defile, I was surprised by a troop of twenty or thirty of the Diroom horsemen:—my escort had been weakened by detaching several messengers, and by a few casualties—and they attacked us so fiercely, that two more were killed at the first burst; so we were forced to trust to the goodness of our horses for safety, and all dispersed, flying different ways, to distract the attention of the miscreants who were at our heels. Two of them stuck by me, and gained on me so fast, that I turned to give them battle, and fortunately shot one of them with my pistol; on which the other ran away as fast as I had done at first, and left me to pursue my way unmolested. I took advantage of this, to plunge into the most intricate and inaccessible parts of the country; but my horse, as well as myself, began to feel the want of food and rest, we were in deserts where nothing of the kind was to be had, and a few hours after midnight I resolved upon seeking this remote spot at all hazards, where my horse, at

least, might feed and be refreshed, before I should push for the pass of Dereguz.

"I shall still," continued he, "allow my horse some farther rest, and snatch a little sleep myself, during which time you, young man, who are fresh, may remain on guard; afterwards, we shall both proceed towards Dereguz: and, as we are now not far from the means of procuring supplies, I shall borrow a little barley from your well-filled joals for my faithful Roushun; who, to say the truth, was sorely put to his mettle yesterday: but he has carried me bravely through many a harder day against my foes, as well as from them, and Insh-allah! shall do so yet again and again." The corn was quickly bestowed, and Ibrahim, recommending to me a careful watch, placed his saddle under his head, covered his face slightly with a napkin, and in a few moments was fast asleep.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SKIRMISH.

The sleep of Ibrahim was that of a soldier; deep and refreshing, yet short and easily put to flight. I sat by his side, or traversed the green turf near him, for little more than two hours, my mind intently occupied with this fortunate rencounter, and in anticipating its consequences, when a noise, made by the horses near us, disturbed my companion, who instantly sprang to his legs, and felt for his arms, as he gazed around. I would have had him once more seek repose, but, casting his eyes to the sun, now high in heaven—"No, no, my friend," said he, "we must not lose another hour—who knows how much we may require it?—how much may be lost or won before the sun sets?—let us be gone at once." Accordingly, without farther delay, we made our horses ready, resumed our arms, mounted, and rode forward.

For some time we continued to ascend the course of the stream, which formed a ravine of considerable depth in the slope that extended down from the mountain-foot. A few stunted trees here and there hung over the waters, and brushwood clothed the hollows in its sides; but the banks, for the most part, were gravelly and bare.

After a course of nearly two hours, we rose from the bed of the stream, and taking a direction more to the East, crossed a part of the slope, which here began to change its character. The wood which partially clothed the mountains, in some places extended downwards over the lower ground at their base; and this occasionally rose into swelling undulations, covered with wood and pasture, interspersed with extensive traces of cultivation. Ruins of villages became more frequent as we approached the mountains; and still farther distant, among the receding valleys of their skirts, the smoke which arose from amid the trees and corn-fields proclaimed that we were approaching the abodes of men.

During this part of our ride, which lay over comparatively level ground, I seized the opportunity of relating to Ibrahim the particulars of my life, since the time of my father's murder and my own captivity among the Tekehs. He was much interested by the recital, and many were

the exclamations it called forth. He was inclined to yield Omer Khan some applause for the conduct which he held towards me, but it was constrainedly and rather ungraciously bestowed: it was a triumph of generosity over prejudice scarcely gained: for Ibrahim, though by nature noble, frank, and candid, had not failed to imbibe sundry prejudices, and particularly against some of the Desert tribes, which could not be conquered, and were seldom brought under decent control. "Yes," observed he, "the fellow saved your life, if you will; but to what end? To make you a slave,—to render you valuable to himself. And if he did make a difference between you and other captives, what good purpose did it serve to you? He saw you were a fine young fellow, and that your services would be useful; therefore he treated you decently: but you see, when there was any talk of giving you a chance of rising—of becoming a free man, he discountenanced it at once. And—may his father be burnt!—the dog! what reason did he give? Why, that you were faithful to your religion and your honour; that you were and would remain a Sheah. The accursed follower of the accursed Omar, may he never see the joys of Paradise! He deny you freedom because you dared to continue a faithful believer! But he will howl for this yet, as well as for all the faithful and holy blood he has shed!

And yet the dog seems to have been a good leader, by your account, too. That was a well-managed business in which you first drew blood; he deserves credit for that—prompt, daring, and gallantly achieved! But give me your friend Selim, that is a brave noble fellow—pity he is a Soonnee! —but what better could be expected in such a place and such company?—But, Ismael, that fellow's devotion and conduct to you will save him from hell, ay, if he were to slay a thousand Seyeds."*

He treated my conduct towards the unhappy Shireen with less severity than I was myself inclined to do.

"It was a silly affair, my lad," said he; "I cannot quite acquit you there. As for what you say about innocence and inexperience, and all that, it is nonsense; I can't believe a word of it! No young fellow of your age can convince me that he did not know when he was going too great lengths with a pretty girl;—no, no, there you were certainly to blame; for though a soldier like me may think somewhat lightly of women, I hate a traitor—a cold-blooded seducer;—but I don't believe you were one. I think, on the contrary, your blood was too hot; you forgot what you should have remembered; you played the

* Seyeds are the descendants of the Prophet Mahomet, and therefore are considered as partaking of his sanctity.

fool, and there is an end of it. But your pretty fellow of a master, Omer Khan—why did he not give you the girl?—that is what he should have done, had he meant to be thought generous—secured her a good husband, and himself a brave son. But never mind, 'tis better as it is; you are out of his clutches, and all may be well. I hope he is not brute enough to hurt the poor little girl; and I 'll tell you what we 'll do, Ismael:—as soon as the affairs of Koordistan are settled, and Mushed our own, we 'll get a chosen set of well-mounted lads together, and make a dash, and carry off your mistress for you, by force of arms."

Thus would Ibrahim talk, and beguile the way with his gay conversation, while I freely told him all my adventures. I felt my admiration for his blunt, warm-hearted gallantry hourly increase; and he, on his part, seemed no less pleased with me.

We continued for some time longer, riding over a track once fertile and well-cultivated, but now returned to its original desolation. The wild pomegranate, the thorn, and the thistle, grew high in the fields, and overran the walls that formerly inclosed them. At length we reached an open space, occupied by the ruins of a large walled village, among which a square building, with

walls of greater height, and towers at each corner, rose particularly conspicuous.

As we approached this place, I felt my heart stirred within me, and my whole frame agitated with a secret and indescribable emotion; visions of past events seemed hovering dimly in my memory, but my sensations were too indistinct and too confused to be intelligible to myself. At last, a vague idea shot through my brain, and thrilled like a fiery arrow in my heart:—with burning cheeks and eager eyes I looked towards my companion, and saw his own bent keenly upon me.

"Knowest thou this spot, young man?" said he, after a pause: "if thy memory does not serve thee, cannot thy heart tell thee what walls are these?"—I gasped for breath, but could not speak.—"Yes, Ismael," continued he, "these are the ruined walls of thy father's house;—there passed the first days of thy childhood;—within that broken tower thy eyes first saw the light!—But its courts are now strewed with the unburied dust of thy kindred, and the foxes and wolves of the Desert rear their young among its roofless chambers. These are the acts of that tribe to which thou hast so long been in bondage—such is the debt of blood, which cries out for thy vengeance!"

I checked my horse to gaze on the scene of my infant years, and my companion seemed willing to indulge me.—Is it indeed true, as some sages have taught, that man's good angel hovers over the place of his birth, and dwells with peculiar fondness on the innocent days of his childhood? and that in after years of sorrow and of crime she pours the recollection of those pure and peaceful days like balm over the heart, to soften and improve it by their influence? How could it be, without some agency like this, that gazing thus unexpectedly on the desolate home of my fathers, the violent passions, the bustle, and the misery of later years, vanished from my mind like a dream; and the scenes and feelings of my childhood came fresh as yesterday to my remembrance? I heard the joyous clamour of my little brothers and sisters; our games, our quarrels, and our reconciliations were once more present to me; the grave smile of my father, the kind but eternal gabble of my good old nurse, and, above all, the mild sweet voice of my beloved mother, as she adjusted our little disputes or soothed our childish sorrows—all rushed upon my mind, and for a while quite overpowered me:—I covered my face with my hands, and wept in silence.

An emotion of deep indignation sprang up in my mind as I contemplated the devastation around me, and remembered the treacherous and bloody

acts that had been perpetrated here upon my kindred. I would at that moment have braved any danger for the chance of wreaking vengeance on their murderers. But deep as this hostile feeling entered into my breast, it never once extended itself to those who had been the protectors of my helpless childhood: the family of Omer Khan could never be less than kindred to me. Whatever had been the crimes of its chief, had he not saved my life?—had I not been to him almost as a son?—and Selim, was he not indeed my brother? did I not owe him more than life? was not his true and noble friendship beyond all ties of blood? Shireen too!—but of her I did not dare to think.

I awoke from the reverie during which these thoughts had rapidly passed through my brain, and turning suddenly to Ibrahim Khan, who sat looking on me with deep attention: "Oh, Ibrahim," cried I, "my family shall indeed find an avenger; the debt of blood shall be paid, if Allah grant me the power to exact it! but the debt of salt*

* Or of gratitude—that which is due to those who have given one salt—that is, the means of living. *Nimmuk-haram*, and *Nimmuk-hulall*—faithful, or unfaithful to one's salt, are phrases used expressively, as grateful or ungrateful. It is likewise well known that the circumstance of having tasted salt or food in any dwelling, becomes a pledge of union and safety between the host and guest, which is seldom violated even among the worst banditti—for hospitality is a virtue of the first consideration in the East, from the earliest ages.

is not less sacred—I cannot be ungrateful, I dare not imbrue my hands in the blood of those who cherished me when I was helpless—whose bread I ate—who loved me like a son. Nor would the father, whose death I mourn, and would revenge at the hazard of my life, acknowledge the son who could act so basely."

"My young friend," said Ibrahim, in a tone that betrayed how much he was affected, "set thy heart at rest. The debt of salt is sacred indeed—accursed be he who would violate the laws of hospitality and gratitude! Ibrahim would never urge thee to do so. May Allah grant that thy principles be strengthened, and that thy actions never swerve from their dictates, or be forced to oppose them! But we linger here too long; this is neither a time nor a place for delay; every ruin and ravine within thy sight may teem with enemies:—let us haste to gain the defile, and get clear of its intricacies ere darkness be added to its dangers."

So saying, we resumed our way, which led us close under the walls of the village, and then wound among a collection of small hollows, formed in the deep soil by the torrents of winter forcing their way to the river. These ravines were scantily covered with thick shrubby bushes and stunted trees, which afforded excellent cover for an ambuscade.

The suspicious character of the ground induced

us to urge our horses on as rapidly as we could with convenience and safety; for the path, which was narrow and stony, wound and twisted around the frequent jutting points, in a manner which might have baffled the recollection of a less practised guide; and we were proceeding in silence and not without anxiety along a deep and hollow way, when suddenly Ibrahim Khan, who was in front, checking his horse a moment to allow me to close up with him, cried out in a low earnest tone, "Quick! quick! follow me at speed, there is danger near us!" and spurring his horse, he dashed forward at full gallop over height and hollow, without stopping a moment, but turning every now and then to see if I was at his heels. In this way we hurried forward for several minutes, at the risk of our necks, his steed appearing to take care of itself, while he unslung his matchlock, struck a light with his flint and steel, and examined the powder in the pan;—then he disengaged his pistols from the holsters, and felt that his sword was ready to his hand: and all this was done with as much coolness and precision as if he had been at exercise upon the maidaun.*

"We are beset," said he; "I saw the point of a spear and a fur cap rising over a bush in yon ravine, and we shall be immediately pursued, for there cannot be a doubt that they are enemies;

* Parade,—exercising ground.

but if we can cross this plain, and gain the defile beyond, where only two can ride abreast, we may do well enough yet:—string thy bow—get thy arrows ready, and prepare to fight for life and death:—now is an opportunity to try thy mettle." I was ready in a moment, and again received the praises of Ibrahim for my expertness. "Thou art a choice hand indeed, youth," said he, "I have great confidence in thee: by the mercy of Allah, we shall baffle the rascals yet.

By this time we had got clear of the ravines, and were bounding over the plain more at our ease. It was some six or seven miles in breadth, and thinly sprinkled with wild pomegranates and thorns, but afforded free enough scope for our horses, and tolerable footing. We had not, however, ridden half a mile when a low thundering noise in our rear told us that our pursuers were on our traces; and they soon appeared emerging from the ravines we had quitted, to the number of fifteen or twenty horsemen, whose great fur caps and long spears proclaimed at once what they were. "Stakhferullah!"* cried Ibrahim, "there's enough of them, to be sure! Oh for five or six of my brave Kuzzilbashes, with their matchlocks and keen scymetars, and not one step farther would Ibrahim fly! But now fly we must, and that in earnest.

* "May God avert it!" an expression of concern and astonishment, like the English "Zounds!" in very common use.

Come, come, put your horse on his mettle; I know mine will serve me: let us see who wins the race; by the sword of Allee, the stake is a sharp one!"

On we swept with redoubled speed:—our horses seemed to know how much need there was for their exertions, and devoured the ground. The distance between us and our foes visibly increased, and they became scattered by the unequal speed of their own horses—the plain seemed to fly backward, and the opposite hills to approach fast. "Barikillah!" * cried Ibrahim Khan, "this is excellent, but it cannot last;—we must not kill our horses! Let us try what the leaders of these fellows are made of—let us see what they will say to a matchlock ball!" Three of the party had kept pretty well up all along, and were not much more than half-a-mile behind us; two or three others were spurring on at various distances, within a mile in their rear; and last of all came on the main body, keeping more together.

"Pull up by degrees," cried Ibrahim, "until these three fellows approach; it will breathe our horses, at all events; and if we are lucky in our aim, we may dispose of some of them, and check the rest for a while." I did as he proposed:—the three first horsemen, supposing our beasts blown,

* Well done!

came thundering on abreast, their spears in rest, protending far over their saddle-bows. Already were they within thirty yards, standing on their stirrups, and ready to bear us down, when Ibrahim, turning round on his saddle, without checking his horse, gave his fire; and I at the same moment discharged an arrow at the group. Whether the ball took place on man or horse we never knew, but there was a sudden cloud of dust, and we saw the middle horseman rolling with his steed several times over on the ground, from whence he never rose again;—the others, checking their horses in full career, wheeled off a few paces to either side, and halted. I saw my arrow sticking in the shoulder of the right-hand horse. Away we rode once more like the wind; Ibrahim charging his matchlock as he went, and I fitting another arrow to the string;—and we quickly regained our vantage of distance.

The next two horsemen now came up with their companions, and the pursuit was renewed, while we strained every nerve to gain the jaws of the defile, which, now hardly a mile in front, opened between two rocky hills, sprinkled with underwood.—"We might gain the pass," said Ibrahim anxiously, "but our horses can never keep up at this violent rate, and the pathway before us is terribly rough. See you yon ruined watch-tower on the height?—it is our only chance. It may

stand our friend against these desperate odds—push on, and gain the tower, Ismael—up that rocky path to the right. I will protect the rear until you are ready to command the entrance from its top;—we shall at least sell our lives dearly."

There was no time for farther words: on we swept like the whirlwind; our horses panting with their exertions, and two of the enemy now gaining upon us. I reached and sprang up the path without accident, although the huge fragments of rock in my way might have baffled a fresher horse. I found that the tower stood within a small walled inclosure, still in tolerable preservation; but the gate having been long ago destroyed, the gateway was open to all, and admitted my horse without difficulty. The tower, which stood in the wall overhanging the defile, had its entrance also by a gateway; but this had been partly built up by some banditti, who formerly frequented the place; and it was with difficulty that it admitted a horse without its rider. I sprang from mine, and dragging him inside, rushed up-stairs to the summit with my bow, ready to defend the entrance. Ibrahim Khan, whose horse had stumbled from fatigue, was but just entering the outer inclosure, while the exertion necessary to recover the animal's footing had deprived him for the time of the use of his

matchlock: at this moment the foremost Toorkoman was close behind with his spear. The moment I saw how matters were situated, I took a deliberate aim with my arrow; and just as the fellow was rising to make his thrust, he received it up to the feather in his heart. Uttering a loud yell, he fell backwards, checking his horse so rudely that it also reared and fell—blocking up the path so effectually, that had his companions been close at his heels, they could not have advanced a step.

Ibrahim, meantime, had entered and got his horse under cover; then, calling me to assist him, we hastily rolled some large stones to the entrance, so as to impede the enemy's progress. This was soon done, for the stones formerly used still lay there. We then hurried above, to defend our castle.

It was full time; for now the whole party of horsemen, sixteen in number, had come up or were close at hand; and three or four were entering the outer gateway together. Scarcely had the first got beyond the threshold when the report of Ibrahim's matchlock was heard, and the Toorkoman, dropping the reins, rolled on the ground; the ball had passed through his body. Nor was I less fortunate in my aim: as the horse of the second, terrified at the noise and fire of the matchlock, reared and turned sharp round, my

arrow struck the rider behind the ear: he fell immediately; and as his foot still stuck in the stirrup, his terrified horse dragged him at speed down the steep, scattering in confusion the rest, who were all busily ascending.

The sudden fate of these men checked the fury of their comrades' onset. Not possessed of any fire-arms themselves, they dreaded the effect of these weapons so much, that no one cared to expose his person; while Ibrahim, unwilling to expend his ammunition, would not fire again until certain of doing execution: my arrows too were precious, for of them no supply was to be had. Thus there was a cessation of hostilities on either side, the enemy having collected under shelter of the wall, and we remaining on the watch to shoot the first who might make his appearance.

This pause was of no long duration; we soon became sensible that the enemy had dispatched one or two of their number round the walls, to see if entry might be obtained by some other passage less exposed than the gateway. The first unfortunate spy, however, had no sooner turned the corner, than he became exposed to our shot, and Ibrahim's matchlock sent him sorely wounded back to his companions.

The enemy had now lost four of their party, and the majority of the rest, in all probability, would willingly have given up a contest against

men so desperate, in which, at best, so little was to be gained. But there were among them some of a more determined spirit, who urged on the rest to revenge their fallen companions, and exerted themselves successfully to inspire them with confidence. On hearing the report of Ibrahim's matchlock, they conceived that he must now be unarmed, and they resolved to make a desperate and simultaneous attack upon our barricadoes. At once the whole party rushed to the outer gateway, some on horseback, some on foot; and regardless of my arrows, which flew not without effect, the principal body pressed forward to the entrance of the tower, while some returned my discharge of arrows from their own bows. "Below! below:" cried Ibrahim, "we must defend the entrance to the last; we must not lose our horses: follow me quickly," and he rushed down to the gateway of the tower, the barricadoes of which the Toorkomans had already commenced pulling down.

My spear now pierced one of the foremost, while Ibrahim blew out the brains of another on the spot with his pistol: "Allah il Allah!" cried they, as they gave back for a moment at this unexpected assault; "they have more guns!" But their rage and determination was now at its height; they returned to the charge, while we, on our part, dealt them ghastly wounds with our spears and

swords. But stone after stone was now falling, and the large breaches gave entrance to their spears, which not only prevented our opposing them so effectually, but slightly wounded us both. We were about to abandon our horses, and to retreat to the platform above, there to sell our lives as dearly as possible, when a confused noise without struck our ears, and caused a momentary pause in the efforts of our antagonists.

The sound came nearer and nearer, and was like the tramp of horse. "We are gone," cried Ibrahim; "it is a fresh party of Toorkomans—let us ascend and die hard there!" At this moment we heard a hurrah! mingled with "Kuzzilbash! Kuzzilbash!" and accompanied with several shots and loud cries. "Allah hu Akber!"* cried Ibrahim, "they are my Kuzzilbashes!—we are safe, praise be to Allah and the Prophet!—Ho, my good steed!" as the horses neighed loud at the noise of the tumult, "we shall now face the villains on equal terms, nor need to fly again." Up he bounded to the platform on the summit, whither I quickly followed him; and from thence, indeed, we saw an animating scene. There were the few remaining Toorkomans flying like chaff before the wind, before a party of forty or fifty Kuzzilbash horsemen, fully equipped, whose matchlocks every now and then rang upon the ear, and a

* God is great.

horse of the fliers was seen to fall, or a fur cap to roll along the ground. Nearer at hand, fifteen or twenty more of our deliverers, having put most of the dismounted Toorkomans to death, strove who should enter first and release those who had been so sorely beleaguered. An officer in rich apparel, who had just dismounted from a noble horse, all foaming with the speed he had made, now entered the court, and, followed by several soldiers, approached the tower. At the entrance he was met by Ibrahim Khan, covered with sweat and dust and blood. "Who art thou?" cried the officer. "Hussun Allee Beg," exclaimed Ibrahim Khan in reply, "is it thou? Welcome, by the hand of my brother! welcome, in any season, to the soul of Ibrahim! but doubly so, when, like the water of life to a dying man, thou comest so opportunely in the time of need."

"Ibrahim Khan! Zohire-u-dowlut!"* exclaimed the officer, starting back with surprise, and bowing low to the ground with respect. "Ibrahim Khan alone, and in this condition! let his slave find pardon from my lord—he would humbly ask!—he wants words to express himself!—he is full of amazement!"—"Nay, Hussun Allee Beg, no need

* Supporter of the State, the name given to Ibrahim, the brother of Nader, in all Persian works which treat of this period. All great men bear titular denominations of a like description, by which they are fully better known than by their proper names.

of so much ceremony now; let me embrace thee, for thou art my deliverer and well deservest it—and let me present to thee my young companion and assistant, who, I declare to thee, has seconded my efforts, on this occasion, like a very Rustum."—"Mash-Allah!"* Ismael, but thou hast made a prosperous commencement of thy career with us: we had a tough business of it with these rascals;—but thy arrows were keen and well planted,—by the holy Caaba, hadst thou not shot steadily and true, that fellow's spear would have done me harm when my horse stumbled yonder. Poor Roushun! he has had hard work for these many days past, and I must bestow myself upon one of these rascally Toorkomans' horses that you have taken, to ease him for the rest of the journey. Why, Hussun Allee, I wish you could have been by, even without these fellows of yours, to have seen how Ismael and I worked yon flying scoundrels, with all their odds of strength;—not but that they are brave enough too, and no doubt they would have done our business had you not made your appearance so opportunely."

While Ibrahim Khan talked thus in the fulness of his heart, we had all got into the court-yard, and the soldiers had gathered around him anxious to know whether he had received any hurts, and how he came to be in such peril; for the frank

* Praised be God!

and kindly disposition of Ibrahim had made him an universal favourite among them. He met their zealous affection with his customary warmth of feeling, and had a kind word or a good-humoured nod of recognition for every one around him. "What! Mahomed Allee, my old friend, art thou here?—and you too, Hoossain Jelowdar? you would not stay behind, I warrant, when there is a chance of getting hold of a Toorkoman horse. Hah, Meer Goonah, art thou sufficiently recovered to measure lances with these dogs of Soonnie robbers? I know thou wouldst not let thy old master have his throat cut, without risking thine to save his—but Insh-allah!* Ibrahim was not born to be meat for such curs: may their fathers be burned!—and thou shalt see me live to make them yelp yet again, please God! Come, who has a calleoon† for me? we both of us need it, for the rogues did not give us much time to refresh ourselves. Come, and while the men are re-assembling, I will tell you all that has befallen me since I quitted the camp at Goonahbad."

Ibrahim Khan then in a few words related all that I have already detailed,—his progress through the border districts, his narrow escape from the Diroom horsemen, and finally his accidental meeting with me, and our perilous adventures up to the moment when we were rescued by the arrival

* Please God! † Water-pipe for smoking tobacco.

of our friends. During this recital, the attention of both officers and men was frequently directed to me; and among the exclamations of surprise and of applause, which the detail produced from our auditors, I was confused and distressed by the share bestowed on me, even while it flattered my vanity. The plain character of our Toorkoman conversation was so different from the more inflated and highly-coloured language of my new Persian friends, that I scarcely knew how to believe them sincere. Certainly, among all the compliments I received, none was so grateful, or so touching to me, as the blunt, but honest approbation of Ibrahim Khan himself, and the simple observation of an elderly man among the soldiers, who appeared to be a personal attendant upon their chief. "Happy," exclaimed he, "is the mother that bore thee, and the father who trained thee to be so skilful and brave! That which thou hast done this day is worth the whole lifetime of thousands; and many are the veterans who would give all their fame to have fought as thou hast done for Ibrahim Khan Keerkloo!

"What! old Cossim Allee, art thou also here?" cried Ibrahim, on hearing the old man's voice: "I saw thee not before: welcome, my trusty old soldier! And thou art right as to the youth, though little has he known of a father or a mother's care. When thou shalt hear to whom he owes his birth,

thy heart will swell with pride to think that he has merited thy honest praise. Know that his father was Moorteza Khan Karabulaghee, and thy old master; and see in him the sole survivor of his family, who has but now effected his escape from these accursed Tekeh robbers."

Cossim Allee turned round, looked full and earnestly in my face for a while, "Khodah Kereem!"* at last exclaimed he, casting up his eyes and hands to Heaven; "I thank thee, merciful Allah, that I have been permitted to see this day" And the old man, falling at my feet, kissed them, anb rubbed his beard in the very dust before me. Much distressed, and greatly moved, I strove to raise him, but he resisted long, and remained overcome with his emotion, while the crowd around looked on with silent interest, and the rugged face of Ibrahim showed strong signs of sympathy. At last the old man rose, and regarding me wistfully again with streaming eyes, while he grasped hard the hand I had given him, "Yes," at length he cried, "I can see it now,—his father's face is there; but far, far younger and fairer. Ai, Khan! can this be all that is left of that noble house, and gallant tribe! and do I live to see that it is so!"—"Come, my good Cossim Allee," interrupted the Khan, "these old tales must be forgotten: you must look for better days. Ismael is now return-

* God is merciful!

ed, and may light the lamp of his father's tomb, and revive the lost name of his family. He is going to my brother's camp, where he cannot fail to prosper; and thou shalt follow his fortunes, as thou didst those of his father. The day will surely come, when he will collect the remnant of his tribe, avenge the slaughter of his house, and raise its name higher than ever." "Insh-allah, Insh-allah!"* responded Cossim Allee: "so may it prove! and praise be to God, who has preserved this young lion of a noble breed!" So saying, he fell respectfully back among those around us.

I now learned that Cossim Allee had been a favourite jelowdar† of my father's, who, being accidentally absent when the village was destroyed, had escaped the catastrophe it experienced. After several turns of fortune, he had enlisted in the service of Nader Koolee Beg, when his good conduct had gained him the protection of Ibrahim Beg, and the command of ten men.

It is needless to say how delighted I was, thus at every step to find a friend; and how willingly I received the assurances of Cossim Allee, that he would never leave me.

* Please God! please God.

† Head groom, from Jelow, a rein, because they are supposed to ride at the bridle-rein of their master, ready for any service.

CHAPTER XVII.

NADER.

"And now," said Ibrahim Khan, "tell me, Hussun Allee Beg, how it chanced that you came so opportunely to this place; and what are the news from my brother's camp at Goonahbad."

"Thy slave," replied Hussun Allee, "would humbly represent, in obedience to Zohire-u-dowlut,* that the light of the nation and pillar of the state was in full enjoyment of health and prosperity, when his servant turned his footsteps from the fortunate camp, which, however, is no longer at Goonahbad, but has been removed to the neighbourhood of Dereguz. The troops of the state have succeeded in discomfiting the rebellious khans of the Shadloo tribe, about Sheerwan, many of their adherents having drunk the bitter potion of death for their crimes, and Lootf Allee Khan having been taken prisoner with

* Support of the state—vide page 232.

several of his principal followers. But while these fortunate events were blessing the august arms of his highness, evil tidings arrived from the northern districts bordering upon the Desert. It is said that the tribes of Merve, and others from the Kipchauk Desert, have been summoned to assist the rebels of Diroom and Nissa; and that the whole Attock* swarms with their marauding parties. These rumours had gained strength ever since Zohire-u-dowlut left the august camp, and were confirmed by many fugitives from the ravaged districts, who came to the presence with complaints and prayers for protection. The indignation of his highness was excited by these insulting aggressions, and he determined to move with his victorious troops towards the point attacked. Accordingly the camp was moved to Chargadeh, where it still remains."—"Good, good, Hussun Allee!" interrupted Ibrahim; "no doubt my brother is at his post, watchful over the welfare of the state; but it is of yourself I would hear —how came you to be cantering so merrily down this accursed pass?"—"Thy slave was about to observe," rejoined Hussun Allee, "that although the defence of the frontier occupied the attention of his highness, the critical situation of his noble brother filled his august mind with solicitude; his highness remembered that the course of Zohire-

* Or skirts of the hills—from a Turkish word.

u-dowlut of necessity lay through the invaded districts; and well knowing that the existence of danger would rather stimulate thee to proceed, than induce thee to delay thy progress, his anxiety became more violent than can be expressed. To add to the distress, certain of thy messengers arrived in the presence, conveying authentic information that plundering parties had already reached the frontiers. Upon this, his highness gave instant orders that several parties of picked men should be dispatched with the speed of light to all the passes of the Attock, with instructions to descend by them to the skirts of the hills, and seek to gain intelligence of his august brother's safety, or succour him in case of need. Thy slave received orders but last night from that sun of victory, to descend by the pass of Dereguz, and scour the country from the Mile-e-Toorpaun, to Koorkan Kallah; when the star of his lucky destiny prevailed, and brought him to the feet of my lord, at the fortunate moment of his need."

"It is well, my friend," returned Ibrahim, "and my brother, as well as myself, shall thank thee for thy prompt and successful exertions. But it is time to think of proceeding: we are strong enough to drive away such marauders as these; but who can tell what force may be within call, and may be collected by the few runaways who have escaped? Besides, it is fit that my brother's

anxiety should be relieved, and that he should be put in possession of all the intelligence I have collected on my journey; therefore let the men be got ready to resume the march, and let two of the captured horses be prepared for Ismael and me, so that our own tired animals may proceed up the pass with empty saddles." "Bechushm!*" returned Hussun Allee Beg, putting his hand to his eyes; and instantly hurried to give the necessary orders.

By this time the men had all returned from pursuit, bringing in some prisoners and horses, besides those from which the party that attacked us had dismounted, and the most of which had been secured. The wounds of Ibrahim Khan and myself, which were of no serious description, were bound up; and mounting two of the best among the captured horses, we left the old watch tower in possession of the dead, and took the narrow path that led up the dehineh,† or throat of the pass.

The hills which formed this entrance, were rugged, rocky knolls, precipitous towards the dell, and continuous with a series of rising grounds, that connected them with the roots of the moun-

* "By my eyes!" or "Be it on my eyes!" a phrase indicating the deep devotion of a servant to a master, his acquiescence in his will, and absolute obedience to his orders—constantly in the mouths of Persian servants.

† Literally "mouth" often applied to the entrance of a pass.

tains. A small stream, at this time nearly dry, ran along the bottom in a confused bed of great rocky fragments; over these also the path occasionally led, but it frequently rose sharply over promontories of rock jutting out from the mountain sides, where the horses had difficulty enough to make their way.

After pursuing this path for a few miles, we clambered up the left side of the hill, and crossing a narrow neck, among trees of moderate size, we descended again into a larger dell, from which the mountains rose in more important masses, and displayed precipices of very imposing height on either hand.

This scenery, so new to me, attracted my attention powerfully; and the impressions it made, fixed themselves deeply in my memory.—The forests which clothed the sides of the mountains, interspersed with huge grey crags, that threatened to crush the traveller as he passed, and had already sent innumerable fragments into the chasm at their feet; the roar of the stream twisting among them in a line of foam; and the wild confusion of rock, stumps of trees, and foliage immediately around our path, was enough to confound the senses of one, who till then had only been accustomed to the monotonous sands and barren wastes of the Desert, or to the smooth green meadows, and stagnant though welcome waters, near which he had passed

so much of his life. But the dangers of the path soon required all our attention, for there are few passes more intricate and difficult than the Koothul-e-Khodaufereen,* which leads into that of Dereguz.

In some places the precipices on either side approached so close together as to leave barely room for the water to pass, and then we had to climb by a succession of steps worn in the rock, or among great masses of its ruins; in others, the intricacies of the path were increased by the torrents which, taking new directions every winter, as the snow lies deepest, tear down and furrow the mountains, carrying the wreck of trees and rocks along with them. In one place the difficulty was so great that we were forced to dismount, and give assistance to several of the horses, which were least accustomed to this kind of travelling; nor was it without much toil that at length we won our way to a more open space, high on the mountain, where a small green meadow, surrounded by rocks and more scanty wood, invited us to repose awhile. Indeed, night had for some time fallen around us, so that to proceed farther would have been highly dangerous, if not impossible, and Ibrahim gave orders for the party to halt. "We have happily passed the Koothul-e-Khodaufereen," said he, "and the difficulty of the pass

* Koothul is a steep mountain pass.

is over; nor can we be surprised in this place by any enemy from below. Place two sentinels, Hussun Allee Beg, on the top of the Tungeh,* and another in advance, at the corner of yonder rock:—let the horses be turned loose to feed in this meadow, under charge of two trusty men; the rest may all repose themselves until to-morrow's dawn."

No time was lost in taking advantage of this permission:—every man dismounted in a moment,—the horses were relieved of their saddles and bridles, and the numuds which formed the saddle-cloths, being unfolded and spread over their backs, were girthed around them. Each man took his saddle for a pillow, and placed them in a circle, so as to leave an open space in the centre, where the heavier arms and our little baggage was deposited. It might have been hazardous to leave so many horses at large together, had they been in their usual vigour and spirits; they would certainly have fought, and probably one half would have been lamed, but we knew that the effects of fatigue and hunger would keep them quiet:—their severe march up and down the Dehineh Dereguz,† had sufficiently quelled their exuberant fire, and after a few screams, hinneyings, and a kick or two,

* Tungeh, literally "a streight," is applied to the narrowest and most difficult part of a mountain pass.

† Pass of Dereguz.

they very industriously applied themselves to fill their bellies with the sweet grass of the meadow.

Their masters did not neglect so sensible an example: a very compendious observance of the duties of evening prayer, was followed by a strict and curious search into every joal,* package, and pocket of the party; nor were the stores produced to be despised. The fare, indeed, was coarse, but we had all fasted twelve hours at least, in severe exercise on horseback, so that the absence of niceties was readily excused, and bread, cheese, garlic, parched peas and the like, disappeared as fast as produced. The cravings of our stomachs being appeased, each man sought out the warmest means of covering in his power:—a huge fire was lighted in the middle of the circle, both to keep us warm and to scare away wild beasts;—and in a few minutes all were fast asleep.

The night passed without alarm:—no sound was heard but the howling of wolves and of jackals, the voices of the sentinels, or an occasional quarrel among the horses; few, indeed, heard even these noises, so sound was their repose.

At the first grey light of morning, however, Ibrahim Khan started up, shook himself, and rousing those near him, gave the signal for renewing our march. The night air in these ele-

* Travelling bag.

vated regions was very cold, and those who, like myself, were slightly provided with clothes, rose benumbed and stiff: the dew, which had fallen plentifully during the night, had wetted us through; and the grass and bushes around were covered with a hoary veil. The ceremony of morning prayers was got over as rapidly as that of the preceding night:—a few minutes' bustle prevailed, as each man caught and prepared his horse for the march:—and in little more than half an hour from the time of our first awaking, the whole party was mounted and in route. I was happy to regain my own good horse, which, renovated by a night's good feeding, and the cares of my friend Cossim Allee, was now once more able to bear me as he was wont to do.

After passing the rock where our sentinel had been posted, we entered a narrow glen, and wound along the stream, which now and then received tributes from chasms on either hand. The quantity of wood diminished, and the hills above the immediate vicinity of the stream, were for the most part rocky, or covered with withered grass and small bushes:—where their summits could be seen, they were bare, and streaked with scaurs of grey stones.

We kept along a very stony path, winding among such hills, and ascending gradually, but considerably, for about three hours; when, quitting

the stream, now diminished to a mere rill, we turned sharp up a ravine, so steep and stony, that many of the party chose rather to dimount than risk breaking their own necks, or their horses' wind, by remaining on their backs. By this path we reached the top of the mountain, and after a steep descent of similar description, found ourselves in a long grassy valley, bounded by rocky and comparatively low hills.

The road being now good, we passed rapidly through this valley, and after descending a little longer among bare brown hills, we came in sight of the town of Dereguz, with its fort, lying in the plain to our left; while rather farther distant, on the right, appeared the white tents of Nader's encampment, surrounded with clusters of the karaooees, or black tents, belonging to the tribes which furnished his army with many of its soldiers.

At first we were at too great a distance to be able to distinguish minute objects; and as our road still wound among the hills, we soon lost sight of it. But as we drew near, and gained a more commanding height above it, the whole of its extent and details lay full in our view; and then, indeed, I felt my whole soul absorbed in the interest they created.

The troops at this time with Nader did not exceed four thousand men, but the camp was

swelled by the multitude of followers and idle gazers, as well as those who resorted to it for protection, or on business with its chief; and all contributed to increase the bustle, and render the spectacle more imposing to a raw youth like myself.

"Well, Ismael! what think you of a Kuzzilbash camp?" said Ibrahim Beg: "is it equal to your expectations? What appearance would it make, do you think, beside one of your aouls of the Desert—of some hundreds of your karaooees?* How is it, compared with your camp at the Chushmah Jemallee? See, yonder are the tents of my brother, surrounded by white screens; and behind, and on either hand, are ranged those of his principal officers:—that to the right is mine, and yon large one with the blue border belongs to the brave and well-known Adinaverdee Khan; and there, in front of all, float the standards which flash confusion and defeat upon the foes of Persia!"

I was too intent on gazing to return any answer; every energy of my mind was employed in surveying and trying to comprehend the hitherto unimagined sights of grandeur and of interest, that now for the first time burst upon my senses. Around the quarters of the general stretched lines and clusters of tents, all white and dazzling in the sunshine, in numbers exceeding any thing I could

Black tents of the wandering tribes.

have conceived. In several open spaces, double rows of horses might be seen, picketed, and attended by their grooms; in other parts, rows of tents, forming a street crowded with people, indicated the well-supplied bazaars; multitudes of black tents, differing entirely in form and appearance from those I had been accustomed to see, covered the plain for miles around the camp, swelling its dimensions to a vast extent;—yet in the great and open plain on which it was pitched, the whole occupied but a trifling space—like a city in the Desert.

As we approached, the movement and bustle in the camp increased: the drums were heard to beat, and the tents and huts poured out their inmates, who moved with a uniform impulse, like streams of water, to the point where rose the tents and floated the standards of the chief. "What can be the matter?" observed Ibrahim Khan to Hussun Allee Beg; "the camp seems all in a bustle; and yet the sight of this small band cannot surely have occasioned this movement? they surely know your troops? they must see that we are not enemies? Why the troops are forming under their different chiefs! Some deputation must have reached the camp; it can be no bad news, for there is no appearance of striking the tents. Let us push forward, and learn what is passing."

We now all spurred our horses and hastened

forward, keeping together at least, if not in good order; and we soon reached the precincts of the camp. Every thing here possessed a strong degree of interest for me, for all was new and strange: the dresses of every one we met, so different from that of our Desert tribes; the rich harness of the horses, which, picketed by the heads and heels, stood in rows, eating their chopped straw; the piles of arms and accoutrements, all so gay and new to me; the shops and bazaars established near the quarters of each chief, filled with provisions and goods displayed for show. Even the black tents, spread low and wide over the ground, like a dark spider's web, were quite different from any I had ever seen; and their inhabitants, with their dark ruddy hue, long hooked noses, deep set black eyes, heavy eye-brows, and full bushy beards, were beings as opposite in appearance to the small-eyed, flat-nosed, high-cheeked, fair, beardless, Toorkomans, as if they had come from another world. The troops were composed of Koords from Dereguz and Khabooshan; Affshars* and Jalloyers,* from Abiverd, Kelaat, and the districts around them; Beiauts* from Nishapore; and some of the Arab and Turkish Eeliats,† or wandering tribes,

* All names of various tribes.

† Eels, or Eeliauts, are the wandering tribes of Persia, who live constantly in tents, have no settled home, and wander continually about in certain districts, to which they confine themselves, in search of pasture for their cattle and flocks, on the produce of

who feed their flocks in the mountains of these places, and are in some degree dependent on their chiefs. The diversity of manners and costume among these various tribes gave an additional interest to the scene, which, on the whole, was of a character highly calculated to impress an utter stranger, like myself, with astonishment and delight.

As we passed along, we learned that a party of the troops had arrived from the neighbourhood of Sheerwan, bringing along with them Lootf Allee Khan Shadloo, and some of his followers, with others of the rebels who had been taken in the late expedition; and that the General had signified his intention of passing judgment on them this very morning. For this purpose, half the troops in camp had been ordered under arms, and Nader himself had already taken his seat in the tent of audience and of justice.

When we reached the Maidaun,* a square space preserved unoccupied before the General's tent, it was completely surrounded with a triple rank of soldiers, disposed in a square. Of these, only a small part were mounted, but the whole were armed; the matchlock men with lighted matches, the archers with bent bows, and the rest with spears

which they subsist.—See Malcolm's History of Persia, and other works which treat of that country, for an account of these singular people.

* Exercising ground, or parade.

shouldered and swords drawn. Ibrahim, with Hussun Allee Beg, followed by myself and a few attendants, entered this formidable array, which opened readily to admit the General's brother; and the chief Yessawul, or master of ceremonies, advancing to receive him, would have announced his arrival to his Highness; but Ibrahim, observing that his brother was intently occupied, did not choose to interrupt him, and signified his wish to remain unannounced until the business in hand should be concluded. I was not sorry at this arrangement, which gave me an opportunity of observing the person of the renowned chief, to whom I was about to be presented, before that somewhat trying ceremony should take place.

Having entered the outward square of troops, we came in view of the tent of audience; but although the front was open in all its extent, the crowd of people that were ranged before it intercepted all view of its interior. From each side, a row of guards, armed with scymetars and battle-axes, extended for about forty yards in front, forming a broad lane to the tent. Within these, and close to its front, on either hand, stood parties of the principal officers on duty.

But two very different groups, in advance of these, speedily fixed my attention. The one consisted of ten stout hard-featured fellows, with strong muscular arms bared to the elbow, each

holding a naked sword; attended by an equal number of Furoshes,* with long sticks in their hands. The harsh, unrelenting countenances of these men contrasted strongly with the varying expressions of the miserable wretches who, with hands tied behind them, and guarded by a strong party of soldiers, stood at a little distance with torn and disordered garments, and hanging down their heads from shame or from despair—it was not difficult to comprehend, that these were the unhappy culprits brought to receive their doom; the others, their destined executioners.

Still keeping close to Ibrahim, we made our way through the line of guards, and making a low obeisance towards the tent, remained standing among the other officers, and full in the view of his highness the General, who was too much occupied at the time to remark our arrival.

However calculated the scene before us might be to excite the deepest interest, my attention was at first directed exclusively towards the chief, whose fame had filled my whole imagination; nor did the view I obtained of his person and appearance in any degree disappoint my expectations.

* Furoshes are menial servants who pitch tents, sweep and lay down carpets, &c. and also go before great men to clear the way for them. They are also made the executioners of petty punishments, as inflicting the bastinado, &c. and in this last capacity weré they standing with the executioners, as mentioned in the text.

In a two-poled tent of no great size, and lined with yellow woollen-stuff of Europe, sat Nader Koolee Khan, upon a coarse numud,* spread at the upper end, near the front, and clad in garments which certainly would not have distinguished him from most of his inferior officers. He wore a kabba,† or ordinary dress of dark-coloured cotton-stuff, girt round his waist with a shawl of small value, in which was thrust an ivory-hilted dagger, mounted with gold. Over this was thrown a barounee‡ of murrey-coloured broadcloth, lined and trimmed with black lambskins of Bockhara; and on his head he wore a turban, formed of a crimson shawl.

But there was no need of ornaments to increase the striking effect of his noble face and person. Though he was at this time seated, it was easy to discern that his stature rose far above the common size, that his person was admirably made, and his strength fully equal to the promise of his appearance. The peculiar roundness of his shoulders would have given an air of heaviness to his figure, had it not been relieved by the energetic activity of his movements and the fire of his eye; while it added in reality, as well as in appearance, to the

* An oblong carpet of felt, used for sitting upon.

† The name of the common Persian gown.

‡ The Barounee is an ample cloak with sleeves, made to cover the whole person; it has its name from *baroon*, rain; against which it is intended for a defence.

force of his muscular powers. His head was large; his face nobly formed; his complexion darkened more by exposure than by nature: his forehead was high and ample; his nose straight and well-shaped: his eyes were dark and full of expression, his brows strong and decided, capable of adding sweetness to the charm of his smile, but bending and wrinkling into a terrible expression of fury when agitated by anger or revenge. I never saw a man whose look was so much calculated to inspire awe, even when in perfect repose: but when his energy was roused—when he spoke, and particularly when he desired to intimidate his hearers, there were few who could withstand the terrors of his aspect. Such was Nader Koolee Khan, as I saw him at this time; and though it was willed by Providence that, in after-days, I should be on more familiar terms with this great chief, the impression which he first made upon my mind never lost its influence.

There were but two persons with him in the tent at this time; both were standing, and to one of them he was speaking when we entered the presence. He leaned his arm upon a steel battle-axe of great size, a weapon in the use of which he excelled, and his scymetar, in a plain black leather scabbard mounted with damasked steel, lay upon the carpet by his side.

After a pause of some minutes, during which

the most perfect silence reigned throughout the whole multitude, Nader turned towards the group of soldiers in front, and an officer made them a signal to advance with their prisoners. Upon this, three men, who seemed to be the principal persons among the captives, were dragged forward; the rest remained standing a few paces behind. Then in a voice, clear, deep, and terrible as that of Azrael, the angel of death, Nader addressed the wretched criminals.

"Lootf Allee Khan Shadloo, and thou Allee Koolee Beg, and ye others, their companions and abettors in evil deeds, give ear to the words of justice. Behold, this is now the fourth time ye have raised the standard of rebellion, and disturbed with your restless treason the peace of these realms. Twice have we ourselves, or those officers who were delegated by us, baffled your treasonable attempts, and then pardoned your offences, consigning them to forgetfulness. A third time didst thou, Lootf Allee, consort with thy kinsman Jaffier Koolee Beg and the rebellious Affshars of Koorgan Kallah, (may shame rest on their memories!) and it was owing solely to the peculiar circumstances of the times, and the timely repentance and capitulation of Jaffier Koolee, that the sword of vengeance did not then descend upon thy head. But the servant of sin cannot escape the reward of his deeds,—the fool never profiteth by expe-

rience! A fourth time hast thou disturbed the peace of Koordestan, and hast even carried thy malice to so deadly a length, as to invite the savage sons of the Desert to fatten on the rich spoil of thy native land. These repeated crimes have silenced the voice of mercy—the sterner claims of justice must now be satisfied.—May Allah receive thee to his mercy!"

At the wave of his hand, the three unhappy men were forced upon their knees, their bonds were drawn tight, and behind each of them stood an executioner, with his naked sword glittering aloft in the sun.—"Ai Nader! in the name of God!—by the holy martyred Hussein!—by the mother that bore you!"—cried Lootf Allee, struggling with desperate earnestness to be heard, while the others also murmured some words which could not be distinguished:—but a stern order to "silence the accursed dogs!" issuing in thunder from the voice of Nader, accompanied by the last signal of his hand, quickened the motions of their guards, and before the sentence was concluded, their heads rolled on the ground, and their bodies, still quivering with life, lay deluging the sand with gore.

Executions were too common even at this time, in the camp of Nader, to excite any great sensation; but a momentary, half-suppressed murmur, which succeeded the deep breathless silence that had reign-

ed for some minutes, betrayed that the spectators did in this case take some share in the terror of the scene. As for me, who, though no stranger to carnage, had never before seen death thus dealt out by rule and measure, or clothed with the terrors of pomp and preparation, I was completely horror-struck; the blood curdled in my veins; it seemed as if I was about to enter the service of a tyrant who made sport of man's life; and I felt a strong impulse to abandon all the hopes and prospects which I believed so promising, and fly from so disgusting a master. It was in vain that I said to myself "These men were guilty; they were traitors and rebels, and they deserved to die;" my imagination was too vividly impressed with horror to listen to the voice of reason: it constantly painted them as prisoners, bound, helpless;—they raised the voice of supplication, and were cut off in cold blood, with the prayer of mercy still hovering on their lips.

The scene that succeeded was badly calculated to remove these painful impressions. The prisoners of lesser importance were brought forward: some of these, as they were named, were recognized for men who possessed no free will of their own, but followed their leaders from necessity. Such were ordered to be drafted into the troops of Nader, or were set at liberty, with a caution regarding their future conduct. Others, probably

considered as more independent, and therefore more criminal in the course they had taken, were sentenced to have their eyes put out, their ears and noses, or their hands cut off. These sentences were executed on the spot, and by no means in the tenderest manner, by men accustomed to the work; and the poor bleeding wretches were turned loose, suffering and forlorn, to seek, where they might find it, the succour which was denied them by their stern judge.

Such scenes as this were not of unfrequent occurrence in the camp of Nader, and it must be allowed they were but bad proofs of his humanity. Yet Nader was certainly not naturally disposed to cruelty; the bloody acts of the period had their source in policy alone: he thought that now, when his fortune was so completely triumphant over all his rivals as scarcely to leave any chance of a reverse, it was wiser to check all opposition in the bud, and thereby prevent insurrection, than have it to combat when matured. In truth, this severity of Nader was justified in a great measure by the conduct of those on whom it fell. Treacherous and cruel themselves, there were none who would not have treated him as they had been treated by him; nor would they have scrupled in the least as to the means of getting him into their power, provided that could have been accomplished. Selfish and unprincipled, they looked only to aggrandize them-

selves; while Nader, at this time, certainly had at heart the welfare and the glory of Khorasan and of Persia, and was cruel only because he was not superior to his age and country.

The tragedy I had just witnessed, and which had jarred so harshly on my previous high-wrought feelings, had its origin in such motives; but, ignorant as I was of the facts and the reasoning above stated, I could see in it nothing but cool-blooded cruelty, and would willingly have avoided exposing myself to its influence: but this was now too late—I was already in presence of the dreaded chief, surrounded by his guards and known by several of his officers. I reflected too, that Ibrahim, his frank, warm-hearted brother, was my friend, and I tried to hope for a favourable reception.

The trying moment was at hand. Ibrahim Khan, observing that his brother had finished the business before him, left me with Hussun Allee Beg, and walked towards the tent. When Nader saw him approach, he rose hastily from his seat, and made a rapid stride or two towards his brother; and those who were nearest, could trace the glow of joy that lighted up his stern features. But he checked himself; and, although he embraced Ibrahim, he would not permit the full tide of his affection, or the joy which he felt at his safety, to flow freely forth. The truth is, that

Nader loved his brother warmly, and fully appreciated his value as a leader, counsellor, and friend; but he had found it often necessary to check the open and somewhat careless impetuosity of his courage, which frequently led him unnecessarily into danger: besides, naturally reserved, and cautious of lessening his authority, either with individuals or with the multitude, by a full display of his sentiments, he restrained them upon principle:—thus he checked the warmth of his expressions, and although he received his brother with cordial affection, it was not without some show of censure for the anxiety he had caused and the risk to which he had exposed himself.

"Khoosh guelden, Khoosh guelden!* thou rash and headstrong brother of mine," cried he, shaking his head, while the pleasure that sparkled in his eye showed that his censure was but lip deep; "by the head of the Prophet, thou deservest that I should place thee in arrest, rather than give thee welcome from thy wild expedition! Thou Zoheir-u-dowlut?† thou the support of the state? yet ever perilling it in thy own person! Shouldst thou not better know thy own value to the country, and to thy brother, than thus to expose thyself to the risk of falling into the hands of our enemies? Had the vile rebels of Diroom, or the dogs of Toorkomans their allies,

* Welcome! welcome!—Turkish. † The support of the state.

got possession of Nader's brother, what thinkest thou would have been his ransom? By the holy Caaba!* a pretty ransom and noble terms would they have demanded for thy liberty! But come, thou art safe; thy star is fortunate, and I forgive the pain thou hast cost me. Tell me now thy adventures, and say what intelligence thou hast brought?"

"Your servant† would humbly represent to your Highness," replied Ibrahim, who well knew his brother's real sentiments, "that, confessing his imprudence on many occasions, and lamenting the uneasiness which it too often gives to the soul of his august brother,—in the present instance, he ventures to hope that the superior judgment of your Highness will attach less blame to his conduct. Upon leaving Semulghan, thy servant found that so many contradictory reports prevailed regarding the dispositions of the Khans and tribes of the Attock, that he did not dare to trust to any less zealous inquirer the task of

* Vide page 203.

† This humble and formal mode of expression may seem overstrained, as from one brother to another; but it is the universal custom in countries where rank, power, and station are every thing, and all else is consequently sacrificed to maintain them. Thus the Prince stands, not daring to lift up his eyes, like a menial servant, in the presence of the King his father; and the same principle is kept up through all ranks of society. Nader was a great chief, and his brother here addresses him as such.

ascertaining the truth, nor confide to any other the more delicate charge of confirming in their allegiance those who might be found wavering or ill-disposed. Of the result, your Highness may judge in part by the contents of these papers. Your servant will await your Highness's leisure to communicate all farther particulars. As to your servant's adventures, they are soon told." Ibrahim then, in more familiar terms, related all that has already been said, prefacing the narrative with some few particulars which had occurred previous to his rencounter with the horsemen of Diroom, and concluding with our fortunate rescue by the party under Hussun Allee Beg.

"And now," continued he, "permit me to introduce to the notice of your Highness my young companion, Ismael, the son of your ancient friend and ally, Moorteza Khan Karabulaghee, and I will venture to say that a braver or more promising youth, has not for many a day enlisted under your banners. Your Highness well knows that I have seen some hard fighting, but more presence of mind, more quickness in conception, or more courage in execution, under very trying circumstances, I do not remember to have witnessed in any person, or at any age." Such was the good Ibrahim's eulogium on my unworthy self, which I almost blush to transcribe.

"Hah!" cried Nader in reply, "let the youth

approach. You describe a very Roostum; he will have a hard task, Ibrahim, to maintain such a character as you have assigned him;—let the youth step forward." The distance was not great: the chief Yessawul * approached, the crowd fell back, and I was immediately in presence of Nader.

The chief bent the full force of his piercing eye upon me, as if he would have read my very soul. There was a fascination in the noble character of his stern countenance, which commanded admiration, and subdued all to his wishes. The interview I had just witnessed with his brother had touched and interested me; the doubts and misgivings occasioned by his apparent cruelty had abated, and confidence was gradually returning to my mind: thus, though my obeisance was profoundly low, and my eyes remained bent upon the earth, a feeling of self-consideration kept my person erect, and my salute free from cringing timidity. The chief, with whom firmness and intrepidity were virtues of the first order, seemed favourably impressed by my deportment: perhaps the soiled and business-like appearance of my arms and apparel, still spotted with blood from my wounds, had its effect, and united with what he had heard from Ibrahim Khan, to confirm him

* An officer performing the duty of master of the ceremonies, in the houses or courts of chiefs and petty sovereigns.

in the opinion that I was fit for his service, and worthy of his notice.

After gazing steadily on me for a while, the chief turned to his brother, and said in a familiar under-tone, "The youth's appearance is not against him; he is young, but hardy-looking, and quite an Affshar in countenance. Young man," continued he, turning to me, "thou hast commenced thy career favourably; the Zoheir-u-dowlut is satisfied with thy conduct, and his good report goes far with me. Thou shalt have employment, and fair scope to show thy own value. Men here receive the esteem and promotion which their own merits determine,—nor, however partially we may be disposed towards thee, for thy services to our brother, or our ancient friendship for thy father, shall the course adopted with regard to thee be different. For the present, Hussun Allee Beg shall provide for thy wants; thou needest refreshment and repose, retire and enjoy them freely."

I bowed low, and was retiring, when the thong which suspended the quiver at my side, accidentally becoming loose, it fell to the ground, and the few remaining arrows it contained tumbled out. The accident attracted the eye of Nader: "Truly, young man," said he, "thy quiver looks like that of a soldier returning from the field; thy shafts have been spent, and spent to purpose, I hear.

They say thy arrows tell sharply and true; come hither, let me see thee use them." I stood a moment irresolute, and uncertain of his meaning: "String thy bow," cried Nader, giving the well-known word of command in use among our tribe:—it carried me back to the Desert, and I instinctively obeyed; old habits rushed upon my mind, and awakened all its energy. "Will your Highness permit me to have my horse?"—said I to the chief, turning round at the same time to look for Boorrauk. Nader smiled at my eagerness. "What is a bow without a string?—what is a Toorkoman without his horse?—let it straight be brought." He praised its figure and its spirit, and turning to Ibrahim, remarked that we were both wild, active creatures, well suited to each other. "Yah, Hyder!—Yah, Allee!*" cried I mentally, as I mounted—"help a good Sheah at his need! for much may depend on this moment."

I now mounted and waited for orders to proceed. The Maidaun† before the tents of the chief was the place appropriated to military exercises, nor were there wanting butts and poles upon which to hang marks for the archers to practise at. The

* Oh, Hyder! Oh, Allee! exclamations ever in the mouth of Persians on such occasions. Hyder is a name of Allee, and signifies the "Lion," i. e. of God.

† Exercising ground.

motion of Nader's arm pointed out the mark at which I was to aim: the crowd opened wide in the same direction, and I started at full speed after the Toorkoman fashion. Three times I passed the lofty pole within a moderate distance, each time discharging an arrow; once in approaching, once in retreating, and once in the act of wheeling—and each time I was fortunate enough to make them ring upon the basin which hung suspended by a thong from its summit. It happened that, as I returned a fourth time, a blue pigeon, numbers of which built their nests in the wells and watercourses of the neighbourhood, flew over the plain, and whether alarmed and confused by the noise, or sent by Allee expressly to do me service, it alighted upon the top of the pole at which I had been shooting. The thought of making this the mark for my last arrow, struck me as I observed it, and I urged my horse to fuller speed, lest the bird should take wing before I came within distance: just as I reached within a long and difficult shot, I saw the first flutter of its wing upon the rise; but my bow was drawn, I uttered an ejaculation to Moorteza Allee, and saw my shaft strike the bird before it had well quitted the pole. It fluttered and fell, while the cries of the crowd rent the air, and, "Barik illah!" "Mashallah!" "Mashallah!" * echoed on all

* Bravo! Well done! &c.

sides. Many years have passed since that day, but I still can remember the thrill of delight with which I picked up the bird, and galloping to the tent, with glowing cheeks laid it at the feet of Nader.

"By the head of my father! youth," said he, "Ibrahim has not belied thee in his praises of thy archery or thy horsemanship: these thou hast now fairly proved; let thy skill and conduct in other things be but equally conspicuous, and thou shalt not lack advancement. But this is enough for one day: thyself and thy horse need rest, and, in truth, he is a brave beast, and should be well dealt with; —where didst thou get him? but I need not ask, for every hoof and sinew speaks him desert bred, as well as thee. Thou art, in truth, a strange youth, and I must hear thy story at large;—but not now. Get thee gone for the present—thou art welcome!"

It now occurred to me, that the General had taken a fancy to my horse. I knew that when a great man has once signified his admiration of any thing belonging to a dependent, it is deemed equivalent to a demand, and expected that the coveted article shall forthwith be tendered as an offering to conciliate his favour. In the elation of the moment, I felt that I could even bear the bitter pang of parting with my faithful steed; particularly when I considered, that my future

fortune might depend upon the sacrifice. Respectfully bowing, therefore, and taking the bridle in my hand, I said, "May the favour of your Highness never diminish! may your servant find grace in your eyes! the horse of your servant is unworthy of your notice—but, pardon the poverty of your slave, and deign to accept his humble offering!" So saying, I offered the bridle to an attendant. "No, no, young man!" replied Nader; "the horse is a good one, and thou meritest him well; keep him, and tend him as he deserves; I promise thee thou shalt need his best service. Meantime, it is thou, rather, who mayest look to me for a token of favour: thou hast exhausted thy arms; the stock shall be replenished—now go thy ways!" "May the happy fortune of your Highness increase! may your favour never diminish towards your servant!" cried I, bowing once more, and left the presence with Hussun Allee Beg.

CHAPTER XVIII.

INFORMATION.

"By my soul! and by the head of Nader!" exclaimed Hussun Allee Beg, when we had reached his quarters; "thou art truly a fortunate youth! A single lucky action, well brought to notice, has done for thee that which years of hard service have hardly gained for others. I have long been an officer—I might say a companion, of Nader Koolee Khan: for, though the dew of prosperity has nourished the flower of his fortune, till its blossoms have fully expanded, while mine has been nipt by the withering blast of adversity! we were companions and equals in early life; but in all that time I scarcely can remember that any youth aspiring to his service, has met with a reception so promising as thou hast done to-day! I know the General, and am certain, from what I saw, that, however cautious he may have been in speech to thee, thy fortune is made, as far as de-

pends on him, if thou but carefully attend to thy future conduct. But beware of improvident security! As the friendship of Nader is honour and fortune, so is his displeasure the certain herald of ruin!—and when thy favour in his sight is at the highest pitch, a trifle may strip thee of it, and hurl thee to destruction!"

"How!" replied I, willing to hear farther respecting the character of my new master; "is the disposition of Nader then so fickle, that a single fault is sufficient in his eyes to efface the remembrance of long and faithful service?"—"No!" rejoined Hussun Allee; "that cannot exactly be laid to the General's charge; his mind is too powerful, his judgment too sound, his understanding too acute, for fickleness to dwell in his soul! But Nader, indefatigably active himself, and possessed of a frame powerful enough to second the energies of his mind, looks for similar exertions in his servants; and is, perhaps, unreasonably disappointed if their efforts do not keep pace with his expectations. Thus it happens, that a man who has once succeeded in gaining his applause, will find, that instead of having reached a point of security from whence he may look in ease and confidence upon the future, he has only attained a dangerous station, where he is forced to support his dear-bought reputation by new exertions. Should he fail in a single point, he

finds that his fault is by no means extenuated by the merit of past services, but rather aggravated by a comparison with his former exemplary conduct. Thus his best and most highly-valued servants fear him even more than they love him: yet they do love him; for he is liberal to his soldiers, careful of their welfare, and scrupulously just. He is severe towards offenders, strict in his discipline, never pardons disobedience, and hates and despises a coward: but who, indeed, dares to be a coward when the frown and the wrath of Nader are more terrible to the pusillanimous than the sword of the enemy!"

"And is the General," resumed I, "as simple and abstemious in his habits of life, and as laborious in the discharge of his public duties, as fame reports?"—"Thou wilt judge of that for thyself," said Hussun Allee; "but I may assure thee that the meanest soldier in the camp lives quite as well as the General does. He seeks not to pamper his appetite with rich pillaws, high-seasoned kubaubs,* and stews swimming in melted butter:—some plain chillaw,† with a few bits of meat, a little bread and cheese and radishes, or even some parched peas, a few of which he commonly carries in his pockets, content him for his evening meal, and are sufficient to sustain his strength and energy upon the most fatiguing march.

* Roast meats. † Plain boiled rice.

"As for his application to business, it were enough to destroy half his officers, were they forced to do what he does. Every morning before sunrise, after the hour of prayer, he is to be found in public, where he sits for several hours, and where the meanest person may have access upon business. He then commonly attends to the discipline of his troops, and regulates the economy of his army: he inrolls recruits, inspects arms and accoutrements among the various corps, observes them at military exercise, and often bestows rewards on such as distinguish themselves.

"A light breakfast, seldom exceeding a few crumbs of bread and cheese, with a cup of buttermilk and water, follows his morning employments, after which he again sits in public. He then decides such causes as may be brought before him for judgment, taking care to see the decisions and sentences put in force upon the spot:—he dictates letters, and transacts whatever business presents itself, till sunset, when, after the evening prayer, if not prevented by a more than ordinary press of business, he retires to the khelwut, takes his evening meal, and passes a few hours in familiar conversation with some of his favoured friends. Should public duty require it, however, these hours also are dedicated to it, for he never suffers his own ease or appetites to interfere with such claims. At a late hour he retires to the women's apartment,

where he remains until near break of day; but in spite of the attachment which it is said he entertains for the pleasures of the Harem, his indulgence there, including the time devoted to repose, seldom exceeds five hours in the twenty-four. Such, young man, are the labours and employments of the chief thou art now to serve, and from this short account, while it cannot escape thee that only the brave and the diligent can hope to thrive under his shadow, thou mayest also perceive that the pleasures and occupations of this great chief are combined in one object, which fills his whole mind—to restore peace and tranquillity to his country, and to drive from its soil the enemies and invaders who for so long a time have been destroying it."

"And are all his officers inspired with the same zeal?" demanded I;—"are the troops to be depended on? And what thinkest thou of the chance there may be of ultimate success?"

"The troops thou seest in the camp," returned the Beg, "are the chosen of the army; they consist of Affshars, Jalloyers, Beiauts, and Koords,* all of whom are bound as much by inclination and interest, as by duty, to fight in Nader's cause. There are few who have not suffered from the incursions of the Toorkomans and Oozbecks; from the malice or revenge of Malek Mahmood, the usurper

* Various tribes of Khorasan.

of Mushed and the country around it; or from the consequences of feuds with their neighbours, the enemies of Nader. Hence they have collected under the shadow of his Highness for protection, and look to him for the means of revenge upon their adversaries, and for peaceable re-establishment in their own possessions.

"But many are led to serve by feelings of personal respect or friendship for Nader: some here are his relations, others his hereditary friends and allies. No inconsiderable number of his soldiers are adventurers, who, willing to follow the fortunes of any successful chief, under whose banner they may plunder and pillage at discretion, have enlisted under him, because they see his destiny triumphant; and although the strictness of his discipline curbs their licentious dispositions, they continue in his service because it is the only one now in Persia that promises security and permanence, and because they well know what their fate would be if they were taken with arms in their hands as his enemies.

"The Koords are, perhaps, the least to be depended on of all our troops: these transplanted,* though now naturalized tribes, are by no means

* The Koords of Khorasan were tribes removed by orders of Shah Abbas the Great, from Koordistan, on the borders of Armenia, to the northern districts of Khorasan, where they still continue a distinct race.

united among themselves; even some of the tribes are divided into parties, and each chief is jealous of his neighbour. Thus Nujjuff Allee Beg, of Khabooshan, hates and envies Mahomed Hoossein Beg, of Radcan; while the Koords of Dereguz, among whom we are now encamped, dread and detest them both, and consequently take refuge under the conquering banners of Nader. To-day you have seen certain chiefs of these Koords undergo the punishment they merited, and which, indeed, their many transgressions called loudly for long before now. I marked your change of countenance as the sword of justice fell, and saw the traces of horror and disgust in your face. But you are young, and unused to the severities which regard to public safety requires from a military chief, who rules a turbulent country. If Allah spares your youth, time will make you better acquainted with such sights; ay, and with more terrible ones still!"

"I own," replied I, "that to take the life of men unresisting and supplicating, in cold blood, in the manner I witnessed this morning, shocked me as a cruel and unmanly deed. Had they fallen in battle, it would have been nothing: they had sinned, and would have suffered death, and there was an end of it—but to slay them when holding up their hands for mercy!—thou mayest be in the right, and the deed may have been needful, but

I cannot yet conquer the repugnance I feel for it. It is not so among the tribes of the Desert:—there is much of slaughter in their wars with each other, and many horrid barbarities are committed on their chappows;* men too are often put to death by one another; but it is in public or private quarrel, when the chance is the same to all parties. If any individual commit a grave offence against the society, the elders of the aoul assembling in judgment, punish him by loss of property, by expulsion, or by selling him as a slave: if guilty of murder, the family of the slain are sure to exact, with severity, the price of blood, or the penalty of his life. But thus to assemble a multitude for the purpose of beholding defenceless captives suffer the punishment of death thus arbitrarily inflicted, we do it not.

"As to myself, I am not to be shocked by blood and carnage alone; young as I am, I have witnessed enough of that, and thou thyself hast seen that I can bend my weapon against a foe as readily as I would embrace a mistress. But I shall conceal my feelings another time, and will suspend my judgment on the conduct of others until experience shall have given me a right to form one. In the mean time, oh Hussun Allee! my thanks are due to you for your most interesting information. By thy soul, and by the head of

* Plundering expeditions.

Nader, I beseech you to proceed: you know I am a stranger in the place, almost in the world, and much require the advice of friendly and experienced men like yourself; make your servant then somewhat better acquainted with the scene on which he is entering, and you shall not find him ungrateful or indiscreet."

"Ismael!" replied Hussun Allee, "many of your observations are founded on just principles, and they do credit to your feelings: nevertheless, they savour strongly of inexperience. You have lived till now in a very confined circle, the members of which are little removed from a state of barbarism. In such a community the restraints of law are less required, or rather their absence is less felt than in a larger and more complicated system of society; because temptations to interfere with the property or privileges of each other are comparatively fewer. But in a populous country, where the evil passions of mankind are stimulated into action by a thousand conflicting interests, vigorous and even severe measures are indispensable to restrain their operation; and it is the neglect of such wholesome severity, which to the unthinking and inexperienced may appear to be cruelty, that has given rise to all the confusion and misery under which Persia now groans.

"And when you say that such barbarities are never practised among your late friends of the

Desert, thereby insinuating that they are less cruel than we, the blindness of your prejudice becomes more manifest. To prevent much misery, rapine, and bloodshed, we occasionally sacrifice a few lives, already forfeited by the laws of nations and of their country. The Desert tribe whom thou upholdest, from the pure spirit of plunder and thirst of gain—without the excuse of original enmity towards their victims, and totally regardless of the misery and desolation they are about to cause, steal, like tigers in the night, upon a village or a town, and sweep it remorselessly from the face of the earth. Which, think you, are the most cruel, the most cold-blooded murderers?—they, or we?"

Truth is powerful—I was silent—I could not then answer as I might since have done, by asking my monitor what proportion of the murders and atrocities that daily occur in states which are considered civilized, he should consider as executed purely upon public principles,—and how many as sacrifices to ambition, cruelty, private malice, or convenience: the very crimes which the severities of the law were provided to restrain?

"For your desire to be made acquainted with the state of affairs in this country, and to know something of the scene on which thou art now to enter," continued Hussun Allee, "it is reasonable; and as far as it is in your servant's power, he will readily

satisfy it; for in truth, Ismael, I will confess that your youth, your bravery, and the peculiarity of your situation have interested me greatly in your favour. I knew your father, though not intimately; he was a brave man, and a respectable chief. I rejoice to see that his son is likely to fill his place worthily, and to keep his lamp burning; I am glad that the General has appointed me your host, though I fancy you will not long remain with me, for Nader never permits his servants to eat the bread of idleness. You are welcome, however, now and at all times; nor shall you want a friend and adviser while Hussun Allee Beg is able to assist thee. At present, it is fit that we refresh ourselves with food: our ride of this morning, coupled with the scanty fare of last night, has sharpened my appetite; and if the death of these rascally Koords has not sickened your stomach, it should now be slow to second mine."

A cloth was now spread upon the floor of the tent, cakes of wheaten bread, the first I had ever seen, were laid upon it, and a large tray of whitened copper, bearing several dishes of better fare than that which was said to compose the General's breakfast, was brought in by an attendant, and placed before us. The truth was, that my host was fond of good living, although he could put up with indifferent fare when necessity required it; and he thought that as his dinner the

night before had been but poor, it was fair to make up for it by this morning's repast. So the pillaw, full of Bockhara plums and raisins, with the savory meat-stew with sweet sauce, was now introduced, and washed down with draughts of excellent sherbet. We both did it ample honour; nor while our fingers were in the dish, did many words pass between us. "Alhum dulillah,"* at last said Hussun Allee Beg, rising from his stooping posture over the tray, and holding out his greasy hand for the water, which was poured upon it from a pewter ewer; "let us now have a fresh calleoon.† Seat yourself at ease, Ismael, opposite me in that corner; and after we have smoked our pipe, I will try to give you a sketch of the information you desire."

It is unnecessary, however, to enter here into the detail which was given me by Hoossain Allee Beg; the more so, as many of the circumstances will be alluded to more particularly in the sequel of my narrative. I will, therefore, only advert concisely to the situation of the country at this period, when I commenced my public career.

Every one knows how great was the glory of Iran when its sceptre was swayed by the earlier monarchs of the Suffavean race. The vigour of their

* Thanks be to God!—the Mahomedan expression for returning thanks on all occasions, as well as after meals.

† Pipe.

powerful administration was felt throughout the reigns of their worthless successors; and even the first years of the feeble, though amiable Shah Sultaun Hoossein, enjoyed a tranquillity for which they were indebted to the fame of his great ancestors.

But this could not last:—the latter years of this monarch's reign were disturbed by rebellions in the provinces; and the neighbouring powers, who envied the greatness and long prosperity of Persia, hailed with joy its increasing weakness, and watched with eagerness the moment of its anticipated dismemberment.

The first serious blow was struck upon the eastern frontier, where Meer Vais, chief of the Ghiljee tribe of Affghauns, who resided at Kandahar, indignant at the oppression under which his countrymen were groaning, and provoked by repeated personal insults, rose in rebellion, put the Governor, Goorgeen Khan, and all his Georgian troops, to death, and established himself in sovereign authority in the province.

His son, Meer Mahmood, who inherited all his father's ambition with much greater prudence, succeeded in cajoling the weak ministers of the Shah into giving him the government of Kandahar which his father had usurped, and affording him great powers and assistance to be employed against the rebellious Abdallee Aff-

ghauns of Herat:—with these he prosecuted his own schemes of aggrandizement: and soon throwing off the mask, he first seized on Kermaun, and advancing into Irak, laid siege to Ispahan itself.

The result of this expedition is too well known to require mention here; besides which, many of the particulars will hereafter be taken notice of in detail. When Mahmood was put to death, he was succeeded by his nephew Ashruff, who at this time held possession of Ispahan, and of many of the southern provinces of Persia.

The usurpation of the government of Mushed, and of many of the surrounding districts, by Maleck Mahmood Seistanee, has already been adverted to. This person, a native of the province of Seistan, was governor of Toon, an ancient city in the south of Khorasan; but having rendered himself obnoxious to the Shah's ministers, he raised the standard of rebellion, and succeeded in defeating Ismael Khan, governor of Khorasan, and rendering himself master of its capital, the holy city of Mushed; where he began to exercise the functions of a sovereign, and subdued a considerable part of the neighbouring country.

While so large a portion of the empire was divided between these usurpers, its rightful, but weak and effeminate prince, Shah Tahmaseb, held

out with difficulty in the small portion of his dominions which still continued to acknowledge his authority:—this was confined almost entirely to the small and difficultly accessible provinces of Mazunderan and Astrabad. The Turks, by a treaty with the usurper Ashruff, had obtained possession of Khuzistan and Louristan,* in the south, and the whole of Armenia, with the greater part of Azerbijan, on the west; while the Russians, on their side, had seized on almost all Sheerwan and Gheelan, and were seeking to extend their dominion along the rest of the southern bank of the Caspian Sea.

Such was the condition of the Persian empire, when a champion appeared in the person of Nader Koolee Khan. Although sprung from a warlike tribe and an ancient family, this chief owed nothing to fortune or to favour. Rich in his own high talents, and powerful in native courage, he carved his own fortune with his sword, and rose to the highest pitch of human grandeur by the strength of his own genius. Merit and success belong not exclusively to those of highest rank. A dark mine gives birth to the keen and brilliant scymetar. Conquerors and kings have sprung from the cottage as often as from the palace.

* Two provinces on the South of Persia; the former of which, lying on the banks of the Tigris, bounds with the Turkish dominions of Bagdad, &c.

Khawah, who delivered his country from the tyranny of Zohauk, was a blacksmith. Jacoob-bin-Leis was a pewterer. The Dilemee sovereigns owed their origin to a poor fisherman. It is not, therefore, matter of surprise that Nader, glowing with the consciousness of his own high endowments, should aim at and attain the high distinction of being the deliverer of his country.

It would be in vain to detail the various struggles and vicissitudes which chequered the years of his youth. Constantly at war with hostile tribes, he was sometimes victorious, sometimes a fugitive reduced to the greatest distress. But his mind, energetic and unsubdued, rose above every misfortune, and considered only the means of repairing it. By his alliance with Baba Allee Beg Ahmedloo, he strengthened his influence, and gained many staunch adherents; while the acquisition of the impregnable fortress of Kelaat, and several other castles of great strength upon the frontiers, enabled him, when in distress, to retire from the fury of his enemies, until the star of his fortune again became propitious.

By dint of indefatigable perseverance and consummate address, by a continued system of plans wisely conceived, and boldly executed, and by a wary and cautious line of policy, Nader had succeeded at this time in extending his authority over the whole northern districts of Khorasan, from

Serrukhs to Goorgaun and Jahjerm.* There was no chief in all that long extent, who did not dread his anger or seek his protection; and though petty disturbances were occasionally breaking out, it generally required but a demonstration of marching to the spot, or the appearance of a detachment under his brother Ibrahim, to restore tranquillity.

The object which for some time past had occupied the attention of Nader, was the destruction of the usurper Maleck Mahmood, and the recovery of the holy shrine of Mushed from his accursed power. Towards the accomplishment of this, much had already been done; the limits of his authority had been greatly contracted; but the country between Mushed and Nishapore was still in his possession.

Some time previous to my arrival, the unfortunate Shah Tahmaseb, hearing of the success of Nader against the malcontents of Khorasan, dispatched one of his principal officers, Hussun Allee Khan, to congratulate his Highness on the same, and to appoint him general of all the royal troops in this quarter; signifying at the same time his Majesty's intention to form a junction with him with all the troops he might be able to muster. The mission was of course well received by Nader, and information had already reached the camp that his Majesty was on his way from Shahrood;

* Two districts on the North-western boundary of Khorasan.

so that accounts were daily expected of his near approach. The belief was, that when the forces should have united, we should march against Maleck Mahmood, and attack him, even should he shelter himself behind the walls of Mushed.

Such is a sketch of the information I received from Hussun Allee Beg, with whom I continued to converse with much satisfaction for a considerable time. I found that he was possessed of no mean natural talents: he had shrewdness and observation enough, but knew not how to use them to advantage. In truth, like too many Persians, he was indolent and inconsiderate in the extreme; he enjoyed to-day, and thought little of to-morrow. Not that Hussun Allee ever neglected his duty; no officer of Nader's could do that: he scrupulously performed all that was assigned to him, but never dreamt of going beyond its limits. He was not deficient in zeal; but the exertion of rousing it to activity was troublesome, so he let it lie dormant. No man was more to be depended upon in the hour of action: and if his commander had a service to be performed, in which boldness and decision were essentially required, it could not be intrusted to better hands than those of Hussun Allee Beg. But with its execution the matter was sure to rest. As for calculating on consequences, or taking advantage of events, and following them up by spirited and judicious measures, such

exertions of intellect were totally out of the way of my worthy host; his habitual indolence of mind had incapacitated him from all exercise of forecast. From this cause alone he had failed to rise in the service of Nader, to whom he was sincerely attached; and Nader, on his side, perfectly appreciated all the good as well as the faulty points in the character of his early friend.

Hussun Allee Beg was an Affshar by tribe, and related to the family of Baba Allee Beg, the father of Nader's first wife. He thus possessed some influence, which he had always exerted in the service of his chief, who in return treated him with consideration and kindness, although he found it inexpedient to promote him to any high command. Hussun Allee, therefore, remained nominally a commander of five hundred men, though he seldom had more than half the number under his orders; and he was employed in services which required more of boldness and dispatch than judgment, like that in which he had so fortunately assisted Ibrahim Khan and myself.

For the rest, blessed with an easy temper, my worthy host consoled himself for slow promotion, by enjoying himself as well as circumstances would permit; and it must be allowed that he never permitted care to prey upon his spirits or his health. He was at this time about forty years of age; his person more inclined to fulness

than that of most Persians; he had a florid complexion, a handsome good-humoured countenance, dark eyes, and a high nose, with red lips and white teeth, always breaking forth in a smile through the waves of his full black beard. Such was the person and the character of my good host; who now observing that evening was drawing nigh, left me, in order to pay his respects to the General, and receive his orders for the morrow.

For my part, as it would have been too soon to have accompanied him to the presence, I amused myself in straying through the camp, and looking at the troops, who were assembling in parties for the evening muster, or examining every thing around me with a curiosity proportioned to its novelty. Nor did I forget to visit my faithful steed, which now, under the care of Cossim Allee, who had constituted himself meer-achor,* or master of the horse, enjoyed as much as its master its relaxation from fatigue.

* Literally, lord of the stable, i.e. master of the horse.

CHAPTER XIX.

FIRST FRUITS.

Hussun Allee Beg returned to the tent by the hour of evening prayer, and soon after was joined by one or two of his friends, attracted, perhaps, as much by curiosity to see his guest, as to hear the particulars of our adventures, which had been a good deal talked of in camp. For my part, I was so eager to become better acquainted with the new world on which I was entering, that every opportunity of seeing and hearing delighted me, and I drank in greedily with eyes and ears all that passed around me.

What a different race of beings have I got amongst! was the thought that perpetually occurred to me, at every thing I saw and heard. What an elegant, what a polite, what a refined people! How superior to the rough Toorkomans! how very unlike them in manners, features, habits! Instead of the dingy, sandy hue of the

Desert tribes, the complexions here were in every variety of tint, from sallowness to the dark ruddy hue of health, and then almost to black; but all were set off with dark eyebrows and thick black beards, piercing black eyes and high noses, in place of the small Calmuck pigs eyes, flat misshapen noses, and scanty bristles, serving in place of beard and mustachios. The distinguishing characteristics were strongly marked, yet they admitted of infinite variety in feature and expression.

The difference of dress was not less remarkable. In place of the sheepskin cloak or jacket, and the brown woollen or striped stuff gown of the Toorkomans, covering a coarser vest, or perhaps a shirt of blue cotton or grey woollen, all girt loosely about them with a rag, a leather belt, or any girdle they might get hold of;—instead of the rough fur cap, black, brown, or grey, coarsely made up from the hides of their own sheep; the rough leather boots, or, in default of them, the rag wound about their legs and forced into a shoe like a leather bag;—instead of all these coarse and mean habiliments, what a rich variety of dress was here! Nader, it is true, was himself plain in his apparel, but, as he rose in fortune and dignity, he did not dislike to see his officers make an imposing and gallant appearance. In his camp, therefore, might be seen the rich pelisses

of shawls or silk, or broad cloth of Europe, lined and trimmed with fur, and covering vests of gaily-coloured stuffs, sometimes ornamented with gold and silver lace: there was the flowing barounee, or wrapping cloak, often of scarlet cloth, with rich embroidery; the smart oemah, or riding-coat, with its ample skirts, and sleeves thrown back over the shoulders; and the warm kuleedjah, or fur jacket, with half sleeves, only serving to cover the body. Then there were the handsome girdles of shawl, either from Kermaun, or Cashmere, according to the wearer's means; the blue or red silk shirts, and trowsers of various colours, descending below the skirts of the vest, even to the ankles; there was the smart green high-heeled slipper, which in camp more frequently gave place to plain brown leather, shod with pieces of bone; or to boots of Russian or red Hamadan leather. Above all, there was the lofty four-peaked crimson cap, the military head-dress of Persia, which, worn by a crowd, had a remarkably gay appearance; and the small turbans of shawl or coloured muslin, that were wrapped around these caps, increased the variety and brilliancy of the effect. If to all this be added the more warlike figures galloping about in brilliant coats of mail and bright steel caps surmounted by a long sharp pike, and upon richly harnessed horses; the glittering arms of every kind, the spears, the scymetars, the battle-axes,

and the matchlocks, that flashed back the rays of the sun from every side,—some idea may be formed of the impression made by such a scene on one who had never witnessed any more imposing spectacle than the array of a Toorkoman plundering party.

But if I was dazzled by the gaiety of their dress, I was still more impressed by the remarkable difference in manner and address between my new friends and old associates. My friend Selim, and, it may be, a few other individuals in our camp, were men of dispositions naturally mild and gracious, particularly when compared with the boisterous bluntness of Omer Khan, and the majority of his countrymen. But I had now fallen into the society of men who maintained such a suavity of manner—so warm, and almost poetical a flow of compliment to each other, that I was at first overpowered and confounded. Every observation, however trivial, was prefaced by some flattering expression; every action seemed to be studied, every motion in some degree constrained. The very attitudes of sitting were to me so new and painful, that I scarce could follow the example of my host. I was forced to sit upon my heels, instead of cross-legged, as was our usual custom; and to show the smallest glimpse of a foot, was, I understood, the height of ill-breeding. At meals, the left hand lay under the same proscription; and I often thought

of the good sheep's-heads we sometimes had to tear asunder in the tent of Omer Khan, and marvelled how we should have accomplished such a feat, restricted as we were here to the use of one hand.

The same fetters seemed even to be placed on conversation; I discovered that when any thing was to be said, instead of coming at once to the point, it was considered polite to use a world of circumlocution, which, in my opinion, very much weakened the force of what one had to say. I was never to speak in the first person; in addressing an equal, I was to denominate myself his servant, his slave; if a superior, I was to be his sacrifice; while those addressed on the other hand, were to be my lords, my masters, the protectors of the poor, the shadow of the unfortunate, &c., whether they had any right to such titles or not. These things, to my rough Toorkoman apprehension, were absurd and troublesome shackles on social intercourse, and I began to despair of ever being considered any other than a rude and vulgar savage.

Many of these reflections arose from what I had seen this day, and the conversations I had already listened to; and until custom made every thing familiar, they were strengthened by all I heard and saw. The intercourse between Hussun Allee Beg

and his friends this night was of this description, and gave me no small amusement.

"Enter, enter! you are welcome, very welcome, my lords, my dear friends, the light of my eyes! —you expand my heart with joy—you bring happiness along with you; by my soul! by the head of my father! you are welcome: how are your noble healths?"*—"May the favour of my lord never be less!—may your treasures increase!—may your noble prosperity endure, please God!—Your slaves enjoy good health, they are happy in seeing your honour well!" Such, and such-like, were the replies that were poured by the guests upon their host. "And your lordship, too, is welcome home —you have been missed—your place has been very empty—your return diffuses happiness." "You have been pleased to ordain great favour to your slave," replied Hussun Allee; "his head is exalted by it!—his gratitude is great:—and your noble honours are quite well, perfectly free from complaint?"—"Alhumdulillah! Alhumdulillah!† —"It is fortunate that you say so; may the blessing

* This and the whole of the following dialogue is a literal translation of the phrases of salutation and welcome commonly made use of upon occasions of visits and meetings of acquaintances in Persia. Perhaps this excessive appearance of ceremony and politeness is one reason for their having obtained the appellation of "The French of the East."

† Thank God! Thank God!

continue!" All this time they were standing up bowing and smiling at each other, and Hussun Allee now ushered them to seats at the upper end of the tent. "Pray let my lords be seated—pray occupy this place."—"No, by no means, not so high." "Your slave entreats."—"No, God forbid! I cannot sit there, it is my lord's place;—let your servant represent in your service."—"No, no, by no means:—I could not think of it:—far be it from me!"—"Well, then, my lord Caleb Allee Khan will sit here, his servant will sit here opposite."—"You have ordained well."—"Bismillah!* Bismillah!" and they all sat down, were silent a moment or two, till they settled themselves in due order on the numuds, and then the same compliments, inquiries, and replies, (word for word almost,) were repeated, until, in compliance with the constant custom at all visits, the calleeoons† were brought, which occasioned another silence.

The Toorkoman pipes are rude machines: a reed stuck into a rough piece of burnt clay, or a clumsy wooden bowl, often answers their purpose. The splendid calleeoons, mounted with silver and enamel, which were used by the Persian officers, were equally new to me with every thing else.

* "In the name of God!" Generally ejaculated before sitting down, rising up, eating, drinking, or any of the most ordinary acts.

† Pipes.

They were handed to the guests by youths handsomely dressed, with red cheeks, dark eyes, fine arched eyebrows, and long locks hanging down on either side the head in gentle curls; each of these blooming pipe-bearers, as he approached his master, drew a few quick whiffs in order to light the tobacco well, and then lifting off the pipe-head with the tobacco from the upright stalk, to let the smoke he had drawn pass clear away before his master should begin to inhale it, he presented the instrument with a low obeisance.

When the pipes were removed, conversation was gradually resumed, and proceeded in a somewhat less constrained tone than at first. "In a happy hour hast thou returned to camp, Hussun Allee Beg!" said Bahram Allee Khan, the commander of a troop of Affshars and Jalloyers from the neighbourhood of Kelaat. "By the head of the Prophet! thou hast made thy face white, thy deeds have been fortunate, and thy fame will be great:—thou hast performed an action of infinite merit, and the General is eternally obliged to thee for this; he owes thee a khelut,* at least! But, by thy soul I conjure thee! let us hear how

* Kheluts are dresses of honour given by kings and princes to inferiors; and consist generally of a suit of dress-clothes, but sometimes of other things,—as a horse, a suit of armour, or money. A full khelut includes not only a dress and arms, but a horse and its harness.

it happened: tell us the particulars, for Caleb Allee Beg and I are dying to know all about it!" "Oh, friends!" replied Hussun Allee; "you do me honour; your favour is more than I deserve; and your praises are as a crown to the head of your servant, as water from the rivers of Paradise to his soul! What should he represent to you? his story is short. The soul of the great Nader, as you all know, fearless for himself, was racked with alarm for the safety of his valiant brother, whom he languished to behold again. The lover, in despair, cries aloud to his absent mistress—'I am full of sadness; night after night do I pine to be near thee! come, my beloved, return to bless the arms of thy wretched friend!'—Among the rest, I received orders to proceed with fifty matchlocks and as many spears, down the Dehineh Dereguz."

Here Hussun Allee recounted all that I have already written; detailing the particulars with tolerable accuracy, and by no means detracting from the zeal and boldness of his party. But if he took sufficient credit to himself, he as certainly attributed our full share of merit to Ibrahim and myself; he exalted us into perfect heroes: Zal, Rooslum, and Isfundear,* were hardly fit to be compared with us! and I sat blushing with

* Heroes of the Shah Nameh, the celebrated heroic poem of Ferdousee.

shame and confusion. Had I been better acquainted with my countrymen, I should have known that no more was meant by my good host in all this, than that, in his opinion, we had done our best under all circumstances, and fought manfully.

The others were not slow in re-echoing his compliments; exclamation succeeded exclamation, and to their praises there were no bounds. "La-il-lah-e-ilullah!"* cried one, "what a desperate affair! What would have become of us, if the Zoheir-u-dowlut had been taken by the Toorkomans? there would have been a catastrophe! Mash-al-lah! Hussun Allee, what good fortune is yours!" exclaimed one. "And what capital good use he makes of it too!" interrupted another. "Our friend is always at his post—always in his duty!" rejoined the first. "Insh-allah!† the General will reward him for it!" said the second. "And this young hero, this Ismael,—praise be to Allah that sent us such a pehlewan!‡ how did he come by all this skill and boldness? where has his fortunate path been till now? What! was it six of the Toorkomans that you killed?"—"Your servant cannot say how many!"—"Barickillah!‖ what

* "There is no God but God!" The first sentence of the Mahomedan confession of faith, constantly in their mouths, as an exclamation of admiration or amazement.

† Please God! ‡ Hero—champion. ‖ Well done.

modesty! listen to that. But you shot the fellow that was going to spear the Zoheir-u-dowlut?"—"Your servant was so fortunate!"—"La-illah-e-ilullah! may your prosperity increase! may your stores be multiplied, young man! We are fortunate in your society; you are a light to our steps, and a sword to our hands; and your shadow will protect the weak!" With such extravagant expressions did they continue to perplex me at intervals, until I was happily relieved by the entrance of our evening meal.

The same young servants having laid upon the carpet before us a cloth, full of the stains of former feasts, and never washed for fear of ill-luck, brought in a brazen basin, and ewer of cold water, and kneeling down on one knee, poured a little upon each of our right hands as we held them one after another over the basin;—this slight ablution prepared us for our meal; then were flaps of bread laid down before each guest, and two large metal trays were brought in, containing an ample quantity and variety of good pillaw, and sweet and sour stews, with other good things, and a bowl of excellent sherbet. Silence ensued, and all of us settling ourselves well forward, and bending over the dishes, buried our hands in the savoury food.

When we had satisfied our appetites, and washed our hands in warm water, we sat our-

selves back upon the good felt carpets, and each assuming the most comfortable attitude he could, we called for our calleeoons, and began to talk more at ease. The conversation now turned upon the state of the country, and the duty we should probably be called on to perform next. "Is it true," asked Hussun Allee, "that the Shah has left Bostam, and is on his way hither?"—"Wullah!" * cried Bahram Allee Khan, "are you so ill-informed? Have you not heard, then, that the Shah has already reached Jahjerm, on his way to Khabooshan, in hopes of being joined by the Koords of that district? and that Hussun Allee Khan has again been sent to solicit the General to lose no time in joining the royal force at Khabooshan? This force consists of about four thousand men, chiefly of the Kudjer tribe from Astrabad and Mazunderan, of whom about one-half may be horsemen poorly mounted, the rest Serbauz, or foot soldiers armed with swords, spears, and bows, and perhaps a few matchlocks. They are commanded by that haughty fellow Futeh Allee Khan, one of the principal Kudjer chiefs, who is reported not to be over-well disposed to the expedition."

"And what news from Mushed?" inquired Hussun Allee. "What is Malek Mahmood about?"—"We hear," replied the other, "that

* Heavens! God!

Malek Mahmood, when he learned that the Shah was really approaching, advanced from Mushed by forced marches, to meet him and force him to fight before he could form a junction with our General, whom he believed to be scarcely returned from Merve; but, being informed of his near approach, he has thought proper to retreat back to his den, and we shall probably have to force him from behind the walls of Mushed."—"And what have you on your part gathered respecting the Chief of Diroom, and his allies, the Tekeh and Yamoot dogs? We know that they have scoured the Attock, but it was supposed that the check given to the rebels of Sheerwan and Goolphooloo, with the capture and punishment of the Shadloo chiefs, would intimidate them, and drive them back."—"I believe that has, in reality, been the case," replied Hussun Allee; "we could hear of nothing beyond parties of forty or fifty horsemen, and neither the Zoheir-u-dowlut, nor the scouts from camp, have collected any information that would lead to the belief of any junction having been formed, or any general plan of attack having been projected. The prisoners we brought in have been separately interrogated, and they could tell of no rendezvous except that appointed for their own particular tribe."

We were conversing thus, when an attendant

hastily entered, to say that a Yessawul* of the General's desired to speak with Hussun Allee Beg and his guest. The curtain of the tent was immediately lifted, and two persons entering, we recognized one of Nader's favourite yessawuls, attended by one of the body-guards.

"Salaam Aleicoom!"† said he;—"Aleicoom Salaam!" returned Hussun Allee, standing up with respect, "peace be with you—you are welcome—your presence brings us honour—be seated."

After a few more compliments, the Yessawul thus addressed my host. "Behold in me a messenger of good tidings to your guest. He has found favour in the sight of his highness the General; and I come by his Highness's orders to inform him, that he has been appointed one of the gholaums, or confidential military guards of his Highness's person. And as the young Ismael cannot be provided with the means of equipping himself suitably for such a situation, his Highness has farther been pleased to present him with this full assortment of clothes and necessaries; and adds thereto this light coat of mail, suited to his youth, a sword of true Khorasanee temper, and a spear with a bow and arrows such as his best archers bear; bidding him remember, that he has once seen him

* Usher, or master of ceremonies.

† "Peace be with you!" and "With you be peace!" the Mahomedan salutation and reply.

use them, and may soon require his skill again. Moreover, the General sends this matchlock brought from Room;* with such he arms his favourite guards;—he says, that the eye which so truly directs an arrow cannot fail to aim with equal certainty the more deadly ball: he bids young Ismael strive to learn the art of using this weapon, that he may compete with his companions in the service; yea, that he may surpass them. Finally, his Highness, knowing that youth may have wants which food and clothes alone will not supply, and willing to see his confidential servants independent and comfortable, sends this purse containing twenty gold tomauns, counselling him to be wise and careful so to use them as to do him credit—his Highness asks no more. Such is my message; and Ismael is required to attend muster at his Highness's tent to-morrow morning after prayers. But his commanding officer is here, and I need say no more."

Surprise kept the party silent while the Yessawul spoke. Of all situations in the service, that of a gholaum was most earnestly sought after by all young men of spirit and pretensions; and was the most difficult to be obtained. In all services of confidence and trust, on all missions of a profitable nature, gholaums were the persons employed: in action they fought around the person of their

* Turkey,—Constantinople; so called by the Persians.

chief, and while sharing with him the post of danger, they enjoyed the fullest opportunity of distinguishing themselves in his sight. That a perfect stranger, known but by one lucky action; a raw youth fresh from the deserts of the Karacoum,* should thus at once be promoted to a station so enviable, struck all the party with astonishment; nor was their surprise diminished when they regarded the messenger sent to announce the appointment:—the General's Yessawul himself, attended by one of his guards too! and with such a present:—it could only be regarded as a Khelut—a dress of honour. The whole was puzzling to them; but they had learned to regard the decisions of Nader so much as the fiats of a superior being, and had so implicit a confidence in his judgment, that they never thought of questioning my qualification for the office; and it produced the gratifying effect of obtaining for me a degree of consideration which could not be indifferent to a youth of my age and inexperience.

My joy at the good fortune that had befallen me was very considerable; but I was not so fully aware of its extent as to be at all bewildered by it. I felt the General's generosity, however, in the handsome present he had sent me, and after

* "Black sand;" i. e. Desert of—applied to the Desert on the eastern side of the Caspian sea.

Hussun Allee had replied to the message of his Highness in good set terms, I stood up and returned my thanks for his munificence in much plainer but warmer language; and so it seemed to be thought, for it called forth many compliments from all parties. The company then finding their tongues, gave vent to their astonishment, but took care to soften what might be offensive to me, by interlarding it with many congratulatory observations, and many assurances that I well deserved my good fortune, ever and anon ejaculating praises of his Highness, who so well knew how to distinguish and reward merit.

At last, Caleb Allee Beg, the Koolevaghassee,* my future commander, who had spoken but little, turning to me said gravely,—"Compliments are well enough, my young friend, among common acquaintances, and may pass upon common occasions; but when people are sincere, such flummery is misplaced and ridiculous. I have heard of thee from Ibrahim Beg, who is not the man to laugh at one's beard, and who knows a brave fellow from a hen-hearted coward better than most men. Thou art now to be under my command; and thou wilt not find leisure to sit thee down and twine garlands of flowers. Thy companions are youths of spirit; lion-eaters; brave fellows, that fear not the cannon when it spits

* Commander of the slaves—that is, the gholaums or guards.

forth fire and balls; but be thou henceforward what thou hast shown thyself to the Zoheir-u-dowlut, and there needs no more—thy companions will be proud of thee—thy commander will be thy true friend, and thou wilt secure that which will repay every toil, the esteem and favour of Nader."

I rose respectfully, and thanked the Koolevaghassee for his frank and friendly advice; and then turning to the Yessawul, repeated my thanks for the good news he had brought me, proffering at the same time five of the gold pieces he had brought me. But he positively declined accepting any thing from me—"No," said he, "I know thy present circumstances too well; thou art a brave youth, and the service thou hast done to the Zoheir-u-dowlut binds every servant of his brother to love thee. Besides, to tell thee the truth, I have been commanded by his Highness to forego on this occasion the perquisite which we Persians, servants of the great, almost invariably expect, as thou thyself wilt soon discover. I cannot receive thy offered gift; hereafter it may, perhaps, be thy turn to serve me, for fortune is changeable, and too often it is to-day a *khelut*,* to-morrow the *felick*.* I must now take my leave; may God

* *Khelut*, a dress of honour.—*Felick*, a beam with a noose on it, in which the feet of those who are to undergo the bastinado are fastened. The saying, which is illustrative of the frequent changes of fortune in Persia, is often literally fulfilled.

protect thee, and you all!" So saying, the Yessawul departed, and the rest of the party soon after followed.

"La-illah-e-ilullah!"* exclaimed Hussun Allee Beg, as we spread our carpets on the floor: "see what it is to have a happy kismut (fate). Many a day have I fought for Ibrahim Khan, and his brother also; and many a Toorkoman's and Koord's head have I cloven with my scymetar; but when did kheluts and appointments shower down upon me in this way? Mash-allah! a gholaum! well, well, thou art a fortunate youth, I say again; but thou deservest it, and I envy thee not—why should I? I am well enough off—I have a good horse, a sharp sword, and good clothes, nor is the cypress waist and the stag-like eye entirely a stranger to Hussun Allee. I enjoy the day,—for, as the poet says, 'Who knows whether we shall have streams as clear, and bowers as sweet in Paradise, as there are here on earth? therefore, leave care and envy to fools, and let us be happy while we may.'—Get thee to sleep, youth—get thee to sleep—A gholaum, truly! La-illah-e-ilullah!'

* There is no God, but God!—see page 299.

CHAPTER XX.

THE SHAH.

NEXT morning, after examining the present I had received, and admiring the several articles of which it consisted—riches entirely new to me—I dressed myself in the suit of clothes provided for me, and taking my arms sallied forth to the quarters of Caleb Allee Beg. I found him mustering some of his men, examining the condition of their arms, and appointing them their several duties. He received me kindly, and made me acquainted with some of my future companions, recommending me to observe and join them at their exercises.

While thus employed, a stir began to rise in the camp; we observed several of the officers posting towards the General's quarters, and in a short while Caleb Allee himself was sent for. This broke up our meeting, and I accompanied my commander to the presence.

There was a number of persons collected around and in front of the audience tent, where Nader was seated, and from these we learned the cause of

the bustle. It appeared that the Shah, having at length arrived in the neighbourhood of Khaboo-shan, was joined, as had been anticipated, by the Koords of that place, with Nujjuff Koolee Beg, their chief, at their head. The Shah received them graciously, and all was going on well, when, instigated, as has been alleged, by the general of his army, Futeh Allee Khan Kudjer, he issued some extravagant or unreasonable orders to Nujjuff Koollee Beg. That chief, it was said, flatly refused to obey them, upon which the Shah, exasperated at his insolence, and farther inflamed by the misrepresentations of Futeh Allee Khan, ordered the Koordish chief to be seized and his head struck off.

The Koords, filled with indignation at the loss of their chief, and uncertain how much farther the torrent of destruction might extend, left the camp and renounced their allegiance to the Shah; but on farther reflection, considering their own weakness, they resolved upon sending deputies to Nader, to solicit his protection and advice in this dilemma. These deputies had just arrived in camp, and the news they brought was the cause of the ferment we had observed.

For some time I could not get a glimpse of the General, who was surrounded by his officers, all anxiously listening to what was passing; for Nader had no interest in concealing the news, so that the

assembly was a public one. At last, I made good my way, and joined some others of the gholaums, who were standing in attendance, and obtained a full view of the interior of the tent. The General was seated as I had before seen him, but his aspect was altered; his brow was furrowed into wrinkles of displeasure, and the expression of his eye was dark and gloomy. He had changed his ordinary dress too for a more military garb: a coat of mail glittered beneath his cloak, and instead of the turban he wore the common cap of the soldiery. His brother Ibrahim, and one or two more old officers, sat near him; and opposite to them were placed the Koordish deputies, who, having told their tale, were answering such questions as he put to them from time to time.

It was plain that Nader was greatly displeased; and not less evident that he took little pains to conceal it. In truth, as the occurrences in question tended to throw odium upon Futeh Allee Khan, who bore him no good will, and to contrast his own prudence and moderation favourably with the Shah's improvident rashness, he scrupled not to enlarge upon all that had passed.

"This is a brave business, is it not, my friends? Stakhferullah!* A gallant man, the chief of a valiant tribe, and loyal too, receives a most inde-

* "May God avert it!"—an oath equivalent to the English "Zounds!"

finite, an unofficer-like order—to comply with which, indeed, his force is totally inadequate!—he remonstrates: his remonstrance is set down as a refusal; and before he has time to explain, off goes his head! This is the method by which a prince in distress endeavours to attach adherents. Barikillah!—he will find too late, if he goes on in this course, that he has caught the bare blade in his hand instead of the hilt. But it is not the Shah's doing,—weak though he be, he has not this folly to answer for; it is that accursed Kudjer Futeh Allee Khan who has misled him by falsehoods; it is he who has eaten dirt.* What think you, Ibrahim?—What think you, Shahveidi Beg? this wretched Nujjuff Koolee Beg was ordered to ride to the gates of Mushed, and keep the Seiestanee and his whole army in check, with his handful of Koords. Allah il Allah! why should a chief be expected to lead the flower of his tribe to certain destruction, for no other end than to promote the intrigues of a cursed Kudjer old woman? But his time is drawing nigh; he will pay for all this. We must march to Khabooshan to meet the Shah, and that without delay. In two hours the camp moves on to Meyabdeh; let the soldiers take a slight refreshment, let the baggage and tents be packed up instantly, and let every

* A common Persian expression for telling falsehoods, or making misrepresentations.

corps march in its usual order. Officers! you are dismissed—see that these orders are executed."

The Khans, Begs, Mimbashees*, and other officers, now left the tent, and soon the increased hum and bustle gave token of preparation: the soldiers and camp-followers might be seen running to and fro, and the tents here and there falling, were rolled up into bundles fit to be placed on camels; but still the General remained dictating to several Meerzas, who were seated and writing in the tent. Caleb Allee, as was his duty, remained in presence, and ever and anon received a hasty order, which sent a gholaum galloping like lightning from the camp. At length his Highness's eye lighted on me. "Hah, my young archer!" said he, "how like you my choice of service? are you content? But I need not ask, I see it in your eyes. Fear not, there will be full scope for all your energy; but you are too raw yet. The eagle herself imps her wing at lower flights ere she soars towards the sun. A stirring hour is coming, see and prepare for it. At present, you are dismissed, get you to your quarters, and be ready for the march." I bowed low, uttered some expressions of gratitude and entire devotedness, and quitted the tent.

By this time the camp was all in motion, tents falling apace, loads ready, mules and camels with

* Commanders of a thousand men.

their tinkling bells, set down in circles waiting for their burthens; the servants having packed up the yekdans,* muffrushes,* and joals,* were eating up the fragments left by their masters; and now, the troops having swallowed their hasty breakfast, began to form in their respective corps. The greater part of the force consisting of cavalry, made a glorious show; for the horses were excellent and well-appointed, and the men well-armed, and in good order. Banners, spears, and matchlocks, with steel caps, and coats of mail, glittered everywhere in restless splendour.

Hussun Allee was not the last in readiness. I found his tent all packed up, and Cossim Allee in possession of my little baggage, waiting my orders. I now discovered that arrangements had been made for me in the equipage assigned to the gholaums, and that I was to share a small tent with two other young men, to whom I had been introduced this morning. My baggage, that is to say, the clothes I had brought from the Desert, with the carpet and cloak I slept in, took their place along with the head and heel-ropes, and other horse-gear of my companions, upon a mule, their joint property, to which I was expected to contribute something in time. They were good-humoured, careless fellows, and we had every prospect of getting on pleasantly together.

* Travelling trunks, and bags of various kinds.

At length the drums began to beat, and the army to move. Our post was close by the General's person, who rode near the head of the line, but behind the advanced-guard, surrounded by his officers and household. The gholaums followed, and then the rest of his guards; after them the cannon, of which there were three pieces. I was delighted beyond all description or control with every thing around me. I found myself in a situation dazzling beyond my brightest hopes, and could think of nothing but conquests and glory. Scarce could I repress my bounding spirits, or keep in the sober order of the march; I envied every horseman who darted past us with orders or on other duty, and fain would have expended some part of my superfluous energy in a good hard gallop.

We left our ground at nine in the morning, and about four in the afternoon the advance of our line of march reached their ground at Meyabdeh, after a march of seven furlongs, or about twenty-eight miles; but the tents, baggage, and camp-followers, did not all come up for three hours after.

In the morning, Nader had an interview with the chiefs of the discontented Koords, in which he consoled them for their misfortune, and promised them his protection, conferring a present of congratulation upon Sam Beg, who succeeded the

murdered Nujjeff Koolee Beg, as chief of the tribe.

The same day the army marched to the neighbourhood of Khabooshan, near which place the Shah's camp was pitched; and it was arranged that his Majesty should receive the homage of his highness the General on the following day.

Brilliant and novel spectacles now daily presented themselves to my gaze. The Shah of Persia!—how often had I listened to tales of his wealth, his magnificence, his terrible power! and now I was about to witness all in his sacred person. I had heard so much of the splendour of his appearance, and the brilliancy of his attendance, that my imagination was quite at fault to suggest an adequate idea of either; so I awaited the truth, with a mind totally unoccupied by any preconceived idea regarding it.

Early in the morning the camp was all in motion; the tents and baggage remained as they were, but the troops were drawn out in their best array. The time of meeting was appointed for an hour before noon, but it was calculated that the previous ceremonies would occupy the whole intervening time. The camp of the Shah was distant about five miles; and Nader intended to proceed to it with an escort, composed of his choicest troops, amounting to about two thousand cavalry.

The power of Nader was by this time too great

and well-established, and the condition of the Shah much too dependent, to render it prudent or expedient for the former to affect humility, or to veil the real prosperity of his circumstances by any affectation of poverty. On the contrary, as this was to be something like a trial of strength between his rival, Futeh Allee Khan Kudjer, and himself, his Highness rather strove to add to, than detract from, the power and splendour of his appearance. Accordingly, the whole of the gholaums, to the number of two hundred; the ordinary guards, about four hundred more; with fifteen hundred picked Affshars, Jalloyers, and Koords, were drawn out in order. The gholaums and guards in rich dresses and bright armour, mounted upon superb horses, with silver-mounted harness,—many of them with heavy silver chains and breast ornaments hung around their horses' necks,—armed with muskets or matchlocks, and Khorasanee scymetars, all brightly polished, made a magnificent show;—nor was the appearance of the other troops greatly inferior. Nader himself chose to be plainly dressed; he wore the Kuzzilbash cap and a light coat of mail—he was a soldier, he said, and would wear a soldier's garb:—his girdle was of plain Kermaun shawl, and his cloak, neither very new nor handsome, was lined with black lambs' skins. Well did he know how little his tall majestic figure required the aid of dress.

But the officers who accompanied him made amends for any deficiency of their chief. His brother Ibrahim, the commanders of the gholaums, of the musketeers, and of the artillery, with several others of rank, were splendidly equipped in armour, with gallant crimson and other richly coloured cloaks, and gay shawls around their caps.

In this array we left our station, about nine o'clock, and marched slowly towards the Shah's camp, our young gallants galloping on in front or darting across the line, practising the spear or the jereed, to prove the goodness of their horsemanship. I joined in this amusement, and was not ill pleased to find my horse and myself a match for the best of them in agility and skill, if not in strength.

Our course lay across some rising ground to the east of the small town of Khabooshan; and on reaching the top of these, we gained sight of the royal encampment spread over the plain below:—there were the red serpurdehs* which surrounded the royal tents, and before them floated the imperial banners. Even at this distance we might see a busy movement among the tents; and when their sentinels descried our column descending the

* Serpurdehs are screens formed of canvass stretched upon wooden poles, about eight feet high, and placed like a wall around the tents of princes and great men, for purposes of privacy.

hill, the drums and trumpets sounded, and the music of the royal nokara khaneh* came floating towards us upon the breeze.

Unlike the audience tent of Nader, which was open at all times to view, the whole of the Shah's pavilions were surrounded by an extensive inclosure of the aforesaid serpurdehs, or screens, so that no one could approach the royal quarters. Before these, on the maidaun,† was drawn up a body of cavalry, and a still larger number of foot soldiers were ranged in two lines on either side. A number of officers and horsemen, who were standing in front of the troops, now advanced to meet us, as an istackball‡ sent to receive and welcome the General on the part of the Shah.

It soon appeared that Futeh Allee Khan was not among them, as ought to have been the case; and this disrespectful neglect did not at all tend to soothe the feelings of Nader towards this nobleman. All the other chief officers of the camp, however,

* A band of music, consisting of drums, trumpets, horns, &c. is always an appendage of royalty in the East; it is stationed generally in an apartment over the gate of the palace, and plays at stated hours, and upon all occasions of ceremony: it accompanies the King wherever he goes.

† Exercising ground, or square space kept vacant before the tents of a prince or commander of an army.

‡ The ceremonial of sending forward a deputation to receive a great man on his approach to any place; or perhaps the deputation so sent, is itself called an Istackball.

came; and after the customary compliments we proceeded towards the dur-khaneh.*

Our approach was regularly announced by the Chiaooshes† who went in advance; and by the time the General had reached within three hundred yards of the serpurdehs, one of his Majesty's lords-in-waiting came forward to say that the Shah had impatiently awaited his arrival, and would almost immediately be ready to receive him. In the mean time, the troops were ordered to halt some five hundred yards distant; and only the General and his officers, with a few of his chosen attendants—among whom I had the good fortune to be—went forward to the royal tents.

Great men in Persia are too apt to detain their servants or their suitors long in attendance before granting them permission to enter their presence. This is done, no doubt, to enhance the favour of admission; but it is ungracious, and often produces needless irritation. Notwithstanding the peculiar situations of the Shah and Nader, that monarch could not entirely depart from this vain affectation of state, and unwisely forced his Highness to wait nearly half an hour at the gate of the serpurdehs. Nader made no remark, and, indeed,

* The gate of the palace, or entrance to the tent of a great man, where his servants and officers await his orders, is called the dur-khaneh.

† Messengers, heralds.

the indignity was too contemptible to be taken notice of; but it did not escape his Highness.

At length it was announced that the Shah was in the pavilion of audience; and the first screen being drawn aside, we were admitted into a small space behind another screen, which alone intercepted the view of his Majesty. The General then was permitted to advance, and each of us in turn came forward, making three low bows, with our hands placed upon our knees. The master of the ceremonies then ushered the General forward, followed by the chief officers, while his other attendants were desired to remain outside of those who formed the royal suite.

The tent of audience was a large handsome pavilion of white cotton, ornamented with crimson mountings, supported on three pillars with golden balls on the top, and lined with yellow silk. His Majesty was seated upon a sofa covered with gold brocade, aad leaned against a large cushion of gold cloth, embroidered with pearls. His dress, as it appeared to me from a distance, was blazing with jewels; but it only consisted of rich cloth of gold, magnificently wrought into flowers with precious stones and enamel. His girdle was covered with jewels, and his arms were bound around with armlets of pearls and emeralds. His turban of gold muslin of India bore the royal Jikah, or plume of diamonds and feathers; round his neck

was a collar of large pearls, from which hung a glittering ornament of many coloured stones. His dagger-hilt was set with precious stones, as were his gold-mounted scymetar and belt, which lay on the musnud beside him. It was a brilliant and novel sight in my eyes; and little did I then think how dear these glittering gems were to cost him. On the one side, within the tent, stood Futeh Allee Khan,—on the other, Hussun Allee Khan, the chief minister,—both in their robes of state: on the outside stood groups of royal guards, Yessawuls, Peish-khidmuts,* executioners, and tent-pitchers, in rich dresses; and in front, the chief officers of state, extended in two rows. It was altogether a splendid assemblage, and, combined with the profound silence and ceremony observed, the spectacle it formed was very imposing.

When Nader approached to salute the Shah, his Majesty pronounced with a loud voice, "Khoosh amedeed! † thou art welcome, Nader Koolee Khan; thy good services have reached the Shah's ears, and he thanks thee for thy zeal." In saying these words, he made a movement as if to reach his hand towards his Highness, who, kneeling down, took and pressed it to his forehead, at the same time professing himself the humblest and most devoted of his Majesty's slaves.

The conversation which now took place was

* Body-servants. † Welcome!

carried on at too great a distance, and in too low a tone, to reach us where we stood; but afterwards we learned that the General had given a full and satisfactory account of his whole conduct to the Shah, proving thereby his fidelity and zeal. He ventured to pass some censure upon his Majesty's advisers for their conduct towards Nujjuff Koolee Beg: he assured his Majesty that the Koords were now willing to devote themselves to his service, but recommended that he himself should be permitted to deal with them. He strongly urged the expediency of immediately advancing with the combined forces to drive Malek Mahmood out of Mushed, of which expedition he would himself take the command, while his sacred Majesty should remain safe in camp near Khabooshan; and it was accordingly decided that the troops should move forward without farther delay. His Majesty then declared his full approbation of all that his Highness had said, assuring him of his unreserved thanks, and ordering him to be presented with the full khelut, or dress of honour, given to a khan and general of a province. After the usual ceremonies, the party received leave to quit the presence; but orders were given that the troops should remain in their ranks until his Majesty should advance the light of his fortunate countenance, and behold the heroes before whom his enemies were to flee like antelopes of the desert, or like leaves before the breath of autumn.

This desire of his Majesty had been anticipated, and therefore gave rise to no other inconvenience than that of detaining the men inactive upon the ground, exposed to the heat of the noonday sun. The General retired to the tent of Futeh Allee Khan to partake of a slight repast, until the Shah should be ready; and, indeed, his Majesty gave us ample time to refresh ourselves, for it was full two hours ere the trumpets announced that he was ready to mount his horse. This being brought forth, and the royal retinue having got all in order, the Shah mounted, under a discharge of swivel artillery from the backs of camels, and, accompanied by the General and all his own officers and guards, rode forward to the ground which was occupied by our troops.

His Majesty was evidently very much struck with the brilliant appearance we made, and the excellence of our appointments; and though there is no doubt that his jealousy was excited, he made many gracious compliments to Nader on the good order of his army. Nothing very remarkable, however, took place; we escorted the Shah back to his tents, and then returned to camp ourselves.

CHAPTER XXI.

PROMOTION.

EARLY next morning the army was in full march to Mushed. If we had not now the glitter which had been displayed during our late visit to the Royal camp, we had more of the business-like appearance of soldiers preparing to dispute with a powerful enemy for a great prize. The gay apparel packed among our baggage, gave place to the well-worn working-suits of many a day's service. The horsemen bound behind them such stores of provender as were sufficient to render them independent of the heavy baggage; the infantry loaded themselves with ammunition and provisions; and all, arranged in their separate corps, marched on with sedate step, and in tolerably compact order.

The progress of the march needs not to be detailed: during its progress we were joined by several large bodies of troops, summoned from

different quarters to take part in the impending contest; so that our numbers rapidly augmented, and our encampment was daily enlarged. On the sixth day, after passing the ruins of the ancient city of Toos, the lofty gilded dome of the sacred shrine at Mushed was seen gleaming above the haze that still hid the city from our view. At this sight, the soldiers shouted loudly, "The Durgah! the Durgah! the tomb of the blessed Imaum Reza! see how it shines to lighten our steps! may the sight be propitious! Insh-allah!" The whole army seemed now inspired with a pious zeal; even Nader urged his horse onward with increased impetuosity. Perhaps he desired it should be seen that he participated in the feelings of his soldiers; but it was only for a moment: he quickly restrained himself, and soon after the army encamped for the night within about two fursungs (8 miles) from the city.

The next day was, in all probability, to bring us into action with the enemy; and although I thought it likely to prove a very different matter from the skirmishes in which I had hitherto been engaged, I was all anxiety for the trial. It was well known that Malek Mahmood possessed a formidable artillery, in which he placed great confidence; particularly as our array was but ill supplied with these formidable engines, so totally new to me. There were four pieces, of small

size, in our camp, which had powerfully attracted my curiosity, as they stood in pairs on either side of the General's tent. This curiosity had been greatly increased by the accounts given me of their dreadful powers, so that I burned to see them used. Until my adventure with Ibrahim Khan, I had never seen the effect of any sort of fire-arms. At the Shah's camp, the Zumbooruks, or camel artillery, firing in salute as his Majesty mounted, had impressed me with a great idea of their powers: but what were they to cannon of the size said to belong to Malek Mahmood! I was impatient to see these engines of death, and hear them roar, even at the risk of proving their effects in my own person.

The troops were in motion by daylight; and the baggage under a strong escort being left to follow, we moved forward to occupy a convenient position for commencing operations against the city. Our forces, which continued to be joined by many recalled detachments, together with some of the Shah's troops, amounted now to upwards of 12,000 fighting men. Those of the rebel Malek Mahmood were not calculated to exceed that number; but, as a constant course of desertion and recruiting was known to be going on, it was impossible to depend implicitly upon the accounts we received.

Upon occasions of importance, like the present,

it was not the custom of Nader to trust to the vigilance of others, matters that he could attend to himself; he therefore rode in person at the head of his troops, detaching a few hundred men as an advanced guard in front, and some well-mounted horsemen on either flank, to give notice of the appearance either of the enemy, or of ambuscades, but performing the duty of reconnoitring principally himself. He was attended in this by many of his principal officers and gholaums; and the whole of his guards rode in a compact troop behind him.

No ambuscade was attempted by the enemy; indeed the ground did not favour any such measure; and the army proceeded unmolested to the environs of the city. But when the advance had reached a point, rather less than two miles distant from the walls, where the road to our encamping ground diverged from that which leads to the north-western gate, some of the horsemen came galloping in to tell that the broken ground near the walls upon our right was occupied by an armed force, whose spears and caps appeared above the ridges.

Upon receiving this intelligence, the troops were ordered to halt, while the General with some of his attendants rode forward to examine the ground. It soon became clear enough that a strong body of the enemy were posted to dispute

our passage, but near enough to the walls of the town to secure their retreat if unsuccessful. Satisfied with what he had seen, his Highness was about to return, when a flash like that of lightning darted from behind a mound of earth, succeeded by a dense white cloud of smoke, and a thundering roar, and immediately a noise, like the hissing of fifty serpents, passed over our heads. "Hah! the ghorumsaugs!"* exclaimed Nader, "they have cannon there; we must drive them away from that." So saying, we all rode back to the troops without suffering any farther molestation.

His Highness now told off a certain number of his guards, and fifteen hundred men of his best cavalry, and directed his brother Ibrahim to lead the rest of the army towards their ground, keeping a line farther to the left. He then shortly told the chosen party, among whom I was permitted to remain, that it was his intention to attack and capture, or drive off, if possible, the guns that had been planted by the enemy to interrupt our line of march, and that he depended on them to do their duty; "Bechushm!"† cried the officers, and the men answered with a shout.

The General led the way, and we marched in silent and compact order, taking advantage of the hollows and irregularities of the ground to get as

* Scoundrels! † By our eyes!

near as possible, without discovery, to the spot where we believed the enemy to be posted; but the birds had flown. They knew that Nader would not fail to make a desperate attack on them, and resolved to meet it in less practicable ground: —we saw a few of their horsemen, and some spears and caps disappearing half-a-mile a head. "We must pursue them, but cautiously," said Nader, "for the ground becomes more intricate; but I know it well; follow me!"

We now moved on at a hand gallop to give them as little time as possible for forming in their new position. It was not long before we overtook our foes, and they stood to receive us. "Bismillah!" shouted Nader, striking his stirrups into his horse's flank; "we have them now: follow me!" On we drove, but had not made thirty yards, when half-a-dozen flashes, and as many loud reports in front, told us plainly enough where the cannon were posted. This time their aim was better; the balls whistled in amongst us, killing and disabling near a dozen men and horses. One poor wretch fell close by my side: a large shot struck his horse in the neck, and himself in the body, hurling them both, mangled and bleeding, on the ground. I shuddered as I witnessed this first specimen of the terrible effects of artillery.

The boldest of us were checked for a moment by this salute; but Nader's well-known voice recalled

us to ourselves—"Forward, forward!" shouted he, "now while they are loading;"—and crying, "Allah, Allah!" in reply, we pressed onward with renewed spirit to the dangerous spot. But here again we were baffled, for a deep though narrow ravine covered the front of our foes, who, finding us so determined, did not venture to await our attack, or even to re-load their guns, but drew them off in safety while we were endeavouring to surmount the natural obstacles in our way. We effected this, however, sooner than they calculated on; and though they succeeded in dragging off their guns, we overtook a covering party of cavalry, some hundreds of which were cut to pieces in revenge for the companions we had lost by their cannon.

As we pursued these, we came in view of Malek Mahmood's whole army, which had been drawn out behind some hillocks, to protect his artillery, and take advantage of any favourable chance that might offer for attacking our troops. No such chance had occurred. The bulk of our army was moving on in good order to the tomb of Khawjeh Rubbee,* where it was intended to encamp; and the chosen detachment, under the command of Nader, after having driven off his vaunted artillery, showed so determined a countenance that no one dared to attack it. Malek

* A tomb of some sanctity, about four miles from Mushed, over which a splendid mausoleum was built by Shah Abbas the Great.

Mahmood, therefore, contented himself with cannonading us from a distance that prevented any considerable loss; and the day passed in skirmishes, all greatly to our advantage. At the approach of night Malek withdrew into the city, and left us to form and intrench our camp at leisure.

It is unnecessary to detail the particulars of this siege, which lasted two months; during which time constant skirmishes, and some actions of more importance took place between the armies, generally to our advantage, and the discomfiture of the enemy. But one or two incidents occurred, which deserve notice.

When Shah Tahmaseb was forced to fly from the power of the Affghauns into Mazunderan, he was compelled to trust himself in great measure in the hands of the Kudjers, a powerful tribe, who had their chief residence in that province, and whose chief, Futeh Allee Khan, very soon obtained an influence over him, which he exercised without either delicacy or moderation. But the unfortunate monarch, though unable to break his chains, was not the less sensible of their weight; and it was to Nader he looked as his deliverer from his secret as well as his declared enemies. Futeh Allee Khan, who was by no means pleased with this expedition to Khorasan, and would willingly have witnessed the discomfiture of Nader, solicited leave to return to Mazunderan, upon

some private business, meaning to withdraw a large part of his followers. The true motive of this ill-timed request was easily discovered by his Majesty's counsellors, who accused the Khan of treasonable correspondence with the rebels in Mushed; and the Shah, not sorry perhaps to have so good a pretext for getting rid of his troublesome protector, ordered him into confinement in the camp of Nader.

In all probability his Majesty did not deem himself secure from the consequences of this decisive step, whilst the disgraced nobleman lived; and one day, after we had been near a month encamped before Mushed, a certain officer from the King's camp made his appearance at the quarters where Futeh Allee Khan was confined, and demanded admission to the prisoner. The guards either recognizing the royal messenger, or possibly having secret orders to guide their conduct, made no opposition, and admitted the officer and his attendant. The unfortunate Futeh Allee Khan, aroused rudely from sleep, opened his eyes to see his most inveterate foe, attended by a man whose father he had put to death, standing over him with naked swords, and faces dark with implacable hatred. He called aloud upon his guards, but no one replied; he tried to spring from his couch, but the powerful arms of his murderers held him down; he struggled for a while in hopes

that his cries might bring him assistance, but all was silence. He then knew that his hour was come.—"Mangle me not," said he indignantly; "let me die decently, and like a man—I will make no farther resistance." Beneath the lifted swords of the two miscreants, the hapless nobleman knelt down, stretched out his neck to the blow, and fell a corpse.

The bloody head was sent by express and laid at the feet of the Shah: it is said he shuddered as he saw the ghastly features of his once powerful though overbearing protector; dim forebodings of evil came over his mind, and he half wished the deed undone. Whether any part of this blood lay on Nader's head I cannot tell, and I will not surmise; at all events, a powerful rival was by these means removed from his path.

When Malek Mahmood heard of the death of Futeh Allee Khan, who certainly was a brave man and a good officer, he resolved to take advantage of the surprise into which he calculated the royal army, consisting chiefly of Kudjers, would be thrown by the loss of their chief: and for this purpose, mustering the choicest of his remaining troops, with the greater part of his artillery, he sallied out one morning very early, intending to attack the camp of the Shah.

But Nader, who contrived to obtain exact information of all that passed within the walls of

Mushed, received accounts of this intended sally, in time to prepare for disappointing its object. Having selected five thousand of his best men, and appointing three thousand more as a reserve, under charge of Shahverdi Beg, he marched from camp before daylight, and posted himself about two miles from the city on the road which Malek Mahmood was to take.

This road, after leaving the gate of the city, winds at first through some rough broken ground, and then among orchard walls and ruined inclosures, which extend to a considerable distance on this side of the walls. It would have been dangerous to take post among these inclosures, where we might be outflanked and surprised in our turn; so we took our station on the plain just beyond the last of them, intending to attack the enemy's column as it should issue from the narrow lane.

We waited with impatience until the trampling and neighing of horses, with the dull lumbering sounds of the heavy guns, gave notice of the enemy's approach: for, as he wished to conceal his march from the knowledge of Nader, he neither blew trumpets nor beat drums. His appearance was the signal for our attack. Our cavalry galloped forward and quickly drove in his leading squadrons with no small loss; and they dispersed to the right and left, like chaff before the wind. But Ibrahim Khan, the commander of his artil-

lery, a brave and skilful officer, quickly perceiving the danger of such a surprise, not only to the troops, but to his own artillery, suddenly wheeled five or six of the guns through an opening between two orchard walls, while three or four other pieces were halted and prepared in the road ready to receive us. Therefore, as we thundered on, dispersing their cavalry and clearing the way before us down the road, these guns opened in our front, while the others, commanded by Ibrahim Khan in person, poured a destructive discharge of large shot and pieces of broken iron upon the flank of the troops that passed within their range. This soon checked the charge and threw the advance of our troops into confusion, for the loss by this first discharge was terrible. But while they were reloading their guns,* our men, encouraged by their officers, and still more by the voice of their chief, rallied again. A part of them, headed by Nader himself, charged down upon the guns in the road, while others wheeled round the inclosures, seeking for an opening by which they might penetrate to those commanded hy Ibrahim Khan, which were too formidably defended to be attacked in front.

It chanced that just before the first charge was

* Asiatics, particularly those who, like the Persians, have but little experience in the use of artillery, take a long time to load their guns:—a large gun is seldom loaded and fired oftener than once in a quarter of an hour.

made, having been dispatched with orders to a corps upon the right of our line, I had not returned to my post when the action commenced, and could not therefore join in that part of the charge which swept the road. Prevented from following, by the crowds that blocked up the narrow way, I called upon the right hand squadrons to follow me round the inclosure which interrupted our course; and no officer of rank being nigh, the men, recognizing me for one of the confidential gholaums, followed me readily to the number of about two hundred, aud we galloped as hard as our horses would carry us to the point where the loud cries and the cannon shots announced that the battle was hottest.

My lucky star was predominant. Scattering a few of the enemy's horsemen, who were forming after their first discomfiture, we found ourselves just in rear of the guns commanded by Ibrahim Khan, now again belching forth death upon our friends. Not a moment did I hesitate. "Allah! il Allah!" cried I, waving my sword, "the guns are our own: charge for Nader! charge, follow me!" The men seemed inspired with my enthusiasm; they never checked bridle, but dashing their stirrups in their horse's sides, bore down like lightning on the topechees,* who, occupied with their pieces, were not prepared for such an assault.

* Artillery-men—gunners.

But we were not long unopposed; the quick eye of Ibrahim perceived our advance in spite of the confusion, and he ordered some of his men to wheel round and receive us, while the fugitives now collecting in crowds attacked us in rear. It was now for life or death we fought; the half-armed topechees fell before us indeed, but bullets were pouring in and scymetars flashing from behind; some of us in turn were forced to face about and repel these assaults, while I still strove to reach the spot where the gallant Ibrahim was struggling to maintain his guns. One of my comrades, too rashly approaching, was cut down by a blow of his sword; and as I came on he levelled one at my own head; but, using a Toorkoman's sleight, half slipping from my horse I eluded the blow, while, with a back-handed stroke, I succeeded in cutting the reins of his bridle, and thus rendered him defenceless. Fain would I have given him quarter, and carried my noble prisoner to Nader, but there was no time for parley: unable to direct his horse towards me, he drew a pistol with his left hand, and before I had well recovered my seat it flashed in my face—the ball grazed my cheek so close that I was half blinded with the powder, but, as his finger pulled the trigger, he received my sword full on his neck, and fell with his head almost separated from his body. Half stunned as I was, I made an effort to secure my prize, while, at the

same moment, a loud noise in front announced some new event. But I saw not what it was—another blow on the head, from behind, brought me to the ground, and I heard nothing more.

When I recovered my senses, I was seated on a bank supported by my old servant Cossim Allee, who held my head against his breast with one hand, and was stuffing some pungent perfume up my nose with the other. On gazing about, I perceived that he was assisted in these offices by Yar Mahomed, one of my messmates, and that Ibrahim Khan, the General's brother, attended by some of his officers, was standing near us, looking on with an air of great interest.

"See! he recovers!" cried my companion, "he opens his eyes." "Alhumdulillah!" responded Cossim Allee fervently, and Ibrahim Khan came forward. "I rejoice," said he, "my young friend, to see you so far revived; we feared you had made a step too far in front, and received your passport to Paradise; but there is enough still left of you to taste the joys of this earth yet a while longer, I hope. I shall tell my brother of your safety—he will be pleased to hear of it. Take care of him, you Cossim Allee; and you, Yar Mahomed, see him safely conveyed to camp." So saying, he galloped off.

My recollection was now restored. I tried to rise and look about me, but sick and faint from

the blow on my head, I fell down again, while the others exhorted me to have patience awhile. "But where are the troops?" cried I anxiously, "What has happened? Where are we?—Where is the enemy?—Where is Ibrahim Khan Topechee-bashee?"* "The enemy is flying on all sides," replied Yar Mahomed; "most of those who still live are by this time within the walls of Mushed. Our victory is complete; the greater part of their cannon remains in our hands; and I may add, that Ismael deservedly enjoys the credit of having in no small degree contributed to this fortunate result. As to where you are, raise him, Cossim, and let him look round." I stood upon the bank with Cossim's aid, and raised my eyes yet aching with pain. We were still on the field of battle: the dead and the wounded lay thickly scattered around among the broken ground; at a little distance was the open space where the cannon of Ibrahim had flanked our first charge, where I had attacked him and so nearly received my death. Parties of horse were still scouring about after a few flyers, who had not yet got under shelter; others were returning, in obedience to the trumpets which announced the place where the main body of our troops were collecting. But hundreds of stragglers were still making the best of their time, and proving their dexterity in

* Commander of Artillery.

stripping the dead bodies, without being particularly scrupulous as to which party they belonged. The walls of the city were hid from our view by the inclosures about us, but dropping shots aimed at such of our men as ventured too close in pursuit, proved that they were well-manned against assaults.

As I stood and inhaled the fresh breeze, my strength returned by degrees; my wounds, which were not in themselves very dangerous, were bound up; and I found myself strong enough, as I hoped, to sit my horse and ride back to camp.

I now learned that Nader, having headed in person the charge made upon the guns in the road, and succeeded in obtaining possession of them before they could be fired a second time, had driven the enemy before him in utter and irremediable confusion for a long way; but, recollecting the artillery in his rear, he returned with the design of cutting off their retreat to the city. On reaching the opening where they were posted, determined to charge them, cost what it might, he was surprised, instead of receiving a volley of shot, to see the topechees almost totally destroyed, defending themselves against a party of his own troops who had got into their rear. On galloping up to improve this advantage, he was just in time to witness my affair with Ibrahim Khan Topechee-bashee, and to see me knocked off my horse by one of the

topechees, with the butt-end of a musket. Another instant decided the affair; the whole gunners were cut to pieces, and their guns remained in our hands. But Nader did not forget his young gholaum: he ordered Yar Mahomed to take care of me, and by his aid, and that of Cossim, who came up at the same time, after securing my horse, I was dragged from among the dead and dying, and carried to the place where I first recovered my senses. Thus I had the satisfaction of learning that my fortunate movement in flank proved, in truth, the means by which the better part of his artillery had been taken from the enemy. Ibrahim Khan, when he saw the increasing confusion of his friends, would not have failed to withdraw his guns by the very way which so well had served us for attacking them.

My head was giddy still, and I rode so slowly that most of the troops were on their return before I reached camp. Upon entering it, I was overtaken by the General himself, as much begrimed with blood and dust as myself. No man, officer, or soldier, exposed himself more than Nader; and on this day his person had been in imminent peril: one horse had its head shattered to pieces under him by a cannon shot, and two matchlook balls had passed through his clothes. His terrible battle-axe had done its duty well: it was said, that eight Affghauns had drunk the sherbet of death

from his hands: and, in truth, his appearance seemed to confirm the report, for, though unwounded, he was spattered with blood from head to foot. "Hah! Ismael, my friend," said he, with a gracious smile, "I give thee joy of thy success and thy safety! Thy gallantry and judgment have not been overlooked, nor shall they be forgotten: when thou art able, let me see thee." But I was not like to be able soon: when I reached the tent, a sick dizziness came over me, and I once more lost my senses.

On recovering, I found myself stretched upon my own couch; my arms and clothes had been removed, and my friend Yar Mahomed was seated on the ground beside me, together with a grave-looking personage, whom I afterwards understood to be a man pretending to some knowledge of surgery, and for that reason entertained in the camp. This sage put many questions to me, and gave me a good deal of pain by examining my wounds; but my head swam round, and I could make no satisfactory replies, so he continued to prate for a while, in a jargon, which, if my senses had been clearer, would have been equally unintelligible; and then binding up my wounded cheek, and applying some simple fomentation to my bruised temple, he took his leave, saying, that he would send me a decoction of very powerful drugs, which, Insh-allah, would make me soon quite well.

Whether this vaunted medicine would have done me good or harm, I know not, for I never put it to the test. A sharp fever came on, and for some days I was unconscious of all that passed. The loss of blood from my cheek, aided by a good constitution, probably saved my life; and after a week's hard struggle, the fever left me, weak indeed, but in a fair way of recovery. My wounds healed by degrees, and though a slight giddiness remained for some time, they gave me no more trouble.

During my confinement I was more than once cheered by a visit from my steady friend Ibrahim Khan; and Nader himself sent frequently to inquire after me while I remained in danger. But it was not until three weeks after the battle, that I was able to pay my first visit of respect to the General, and even then I was pale and emaciated from the effects of confinement.

I experienced a very gracious reception, and his Highness, after taking occasion to remark that he was greatly indebted to my decision and gallantry for the important success gained by his army on the day I was wounded, continued, " I believe, Ismael, that you desire to continue near my person, and, in truth, I wish it also; therefore, you shall still remain one of my gholaums; but I give you the rank of captain of two hundred men in my guards, and desire that henceforth you carry

the title of Beg, which is your right by birth, and which I shall take care to have confirmed by the Shah, for your good service in his cause. The khelut of your office shall be sent to you immediately. Take care of your health, that you may be enabled soon to resume your duties."

Prepared as I was to expect some signal proof of the General's favour, that which was now bestowed upon me, so far exceeded my anticipations, that at first it overwhelmed and confounded me; and its after-effects on my mind were not, I fear, of the best description. I was grateful, very grateful;—but if the truth must be told, pride and arrogance arose in my heart—I began to think myself a great man, assumed a loftier air than before, and committed divers other follies of a similar sort. Neglect of duty, however, was not among them; and as soon as my health permitted, I returned to my usual constant attendance at the dur-khaneh, and the customary military service.

Tedious as the siege had been, it drew to a close before I was able to resume an active share in it. After the loss of his artillery, Malek Mahmood never dared to show himself without the walls; his sallies became more rare and less effective; his troops were thinned by casualties, but still more by desertion; and although we had not enough of ammunition to render the captured guns

of service to us, their loss was so great a deprivation to our foe, that the fate of the city soon became clearly inevitable.

The catastrophe was only a little hastened by treachery. Nader, who had kept up a constant intercourse with certain persons within the walls, found means at length to prevail on one Peer Mahomed, an officer of rank in the service of Malek, to favour our entrance at one of the gates, of which he had the charge. This man, foreseeing the imminent downfal of his master, was desirous of providing for himself, and stipulated for the government of Jam, a town between Mushed and Herat, as the price of his treachery, which was to be accomplished by murdering the guard of the gate, and opening it to our troops upon a certain night agreed upon.

On that night, Nader, taking with him a large party of his best men upon foot, silently approached the town, and leaving the greater part of them concealed in the broken ground near the walls, he crept cautiously to the gate with a small number of attendants. To avoid, as much as possible, the chance of discovery, they ranged themselves close under the wall; which, the ditch being dry, was easily done; and in this situation they remained for two hours, at which time their attention was awakened by two or three half-stifled cries, and three or four bleeding heads were

thrown amongst them from the parapet above. This was the preconcerted signal. True to his promise, Peer Mahomed, along with a trusty attendant, had fallen upon the sentinel and the few guards on duty, and put them to death, throwing their severed heads over the wall. Nader and his men ran to the gate, which yielded to their efforts; and making a signal to the ambushed troops, they rushed in and secured the post. Before the alarm had spread, the troops, already told off in divisions, ran to their several appointed posts, and, putting the enemy's guards to death, seized on all the important points of the place with little resistance. The troops of Malek Mahmood attempting to assemble in haste were cut to pieces, or fled with their master, who shut himself up in the citadel. Nader first cleared the way to the sacred shrine, and then turning to the left, drove all before him to the gardens of the Char Baugh, of which he took immediate possession.

As soon as day broke, Malek Mahmood made an attempt to recover the town. Issuing from the citadel, he attacked our troops in several points, but totally without success: and this failure proving to him the folly of farther resistance, he surrendered himself next day at discretion; declaring his resolution of renouncing the world, assuming the garb of a Dervish, and taking up his abode in the sacred mausoleum.